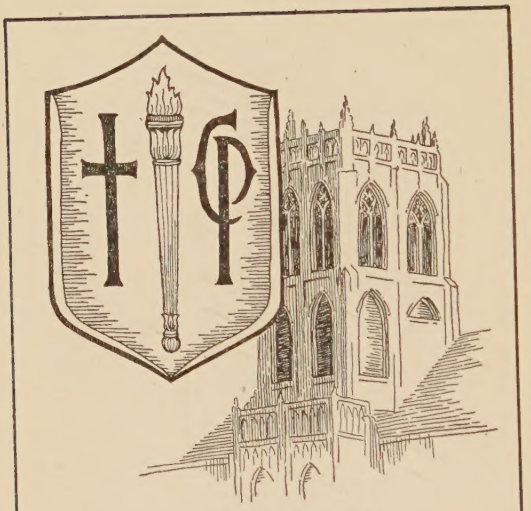
THE ODYSSEY OF A NICE GIRL

RUTH SUCKOW



COLLEGE
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WITHDRAWN

The Odyssey of a Nice Girl

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College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

The Odyssey of a Nice Girl

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The Bonney Family

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PART I

Chapter I

I

THE Schoessels—Ed and Etta and the three children, Rich, Marjorie, and Buddie—went sometimes in the summer to visit Grandma and Grandpa Schoessel in the country near Germantown. They visited much oftener at Shell Rock, with the Blossoms, "Etta's folks."

It was August before they got away. It always seemed to be the hottest weather when they made that trip to Germantown. They had to leave Buena Vista in the morning on the local, wait three hours in Guthrie—or four, or five, or six; "Can't depend much on the freight," the station agent told them—take the freight when it did get there, change again at Collins, and then drive six miles out in the country. As everyone said, it could get the hottest on that local! There were two little coaches with red plush seats dusty and sprinkled with bits of peanut shells, pink gum wrappers and sputum on the floor underneath; with windows that stuck; and an old conductor with silver-rimmed spectacles who was known as "Dad" Busby all along the line.

After they left Buena Vista the country grew flatter, more like southern Minnesota, with sloughs and willow groves, and muddy black roads. They were all small towns between Buena Vista and Guthrie. "Dinky little burgs." Byron, Oak Grove, Pomeroy, Hayfield, High Prairie. Buena Vista had three thousand inhabitants and was the county seat.

They had to eat their lunch on the train. This offended Marjorie's fastidiousness. When the Coles had gone to the

Pan-American Exposition, they had eaten all their meals on the diner. Marjorie refused to do more than peck daintily at the sandwiches of fresh bread and butter and the piece of white meat saved specially for her. She looked coldly at the fresh eggs that Orpha Putz had brought over "to go in the lunch." Her small scornful face and little nibblings at the food were a condemnation that made them all uncomfortable.

"Well, Margie, we have to eat," her mother urged. "How else can we do it? Won't you just taste one of these lovely eggs that mamma wrapped up so carefully and put in the box for you?"

"Oh, Margie's so fussy about everything," her father complained.

But it made him feel guilty. He was responsible for these trips, and he always felt that the local and the freight, the heat, and the wait at Guthrie, were his fault. He knew that his family would rather have gone to Shell Rock, that these were duty trips. Things were plain on the farm, although there were changes now that his sister Lottie and her husband were in charge, and had built over the house. His parents had come from the old country. Their ways were different from the ways that his children knew. His wife, too, had once lived on a farm, just at the edge of Shell Rock. But Grandma and Grandpa Blossom were native Americans from "York State." Etta was entitled, on her mother's side, to be a member of the D. A. R. The Blossoms were esteemed citizens, leading members of the Congregational Church. Etta and her sister Bessie had had a year at a small denominational college, and had both taught school. The family had thought that Etta was condescending a little in marrying Ed Schoessel, although he was a good steady young fellow and would probably do well.

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At Guthrie, they were driven over to the other station in a rickety bus. It was not far to walk, but they got the

transfer with their tickets. The ancient bus, in which they were the only passengers, jolted over the hard ruts and pulled up sharply at the long wooden platform.

The low red station was crusted over with sandy stuff, so that Buddie always said that it was "sugared." The long hot tracks, with the rails scraped steely along the side, had ties brownish with oil half sunk into hot black cinders. Some empty freight cars stood there. Etta would not let Rich explore them, because tramps sometimes hid in freight cars. The squat maroon-coloured water tank, the platform, were starkly hot. Across the tracks stood a row of sheds about which weeds clustered.

It was muggy to-day. There was a glisten of sweat on their faces as they sat in the waiting-room with its dusty floor, the long hard shiny benches with iron arms, the fly-specked map of Iowa on the wall, the little ticket window with its ledge painted a pale-greenish colour, and the incessant click of the telegraph.

The boys tried to walk the tracks, and, when ordered away from those, demanded leave to go down town.

"Buddie too?"

Buddie cried immediately: "I'm goin' if Rich goes!"

"Well—if you boys will promise to be careful."

Buddie did look like such a little fellow. Trotting off so confidently in that summer suit his mother had made him, with the short jacket and big ruffled sailor collar and Windsor tie, his legs almost too fat for those little tight, starched trousers. Rich had insisted on wearing the base-ball cap donated by one of the grocers with every ten-cent purchase. It was of thin cambric with "B. V." in white letters, and with a shiny black bill that was already cracked through the middle. Such a looking thing for the train—but Rich would not stir without it!

These excursions were mysterious. "What do the boys always find to do?" their mother asked. They looked in at store windows, and stopped in the doorway of the blacksmith shop. The blacksmith remembered them from two

summers ago. He said: "Hello, boys! Ain't you the two fellows come in here once before? I thought so. The little fellow's growed, ain't he?" The boys were always making friends among men in stores and at stations, and fishing along the river. They talked to all the farmers and travelling men who came to the store at home.

Marjorie would not stir from the station. Her father had a very shrewd notion that her chief ailment came from the fact that she did not want to go to Germantown. She had declared before they started that she didn't feel well; had wept a little, and refused to eat anything but a banana for breakfast. It was that party of Neva's that ailed her. Her parents felt a little guilty about making the child miss that. But they had let her stay for the Sunday School picnic, and for her recital at which she and Neva had played a duet. She thought that Buster would be lonesome. Old Mrs. Putz and Orpha, next door, had promised to look after him. They had promised that he should have the kind of bones that he liked.

Marjorie sat forlornly on the hard bench. They had let her take her little white ruffled parasol, although it would be nothing but a nuisance in the country. She had insisted on wearing her new dress with the embroidered yoke, scorning the old sailor suit which had been declared good enough for a trip like this.

Etta gasped: "Oh, papa, it is dreadful in here! Can't we find some other place?"

"Shall we go to the hotel, then?"

"That awful hotel! Oh, I suppose there's nowhere else to go."

There were stores on only one side of the street in Guthrie. On the other were the schoolhouse, a few old dwelling-houses, and the photograph gallery, a little frame building standing dismally by itself in a vacant lot. The hotel was an old-fashioned brown frame building. Ed stayed down in the lobby, a room with bare floor, spittoons, and a row of

wooden rocking-chairs facing the large front windows. The Ladies' Parlour was on the second floor.

Etta said warningly, before they went up: "Margie, you'd better come with mamma."

"Oh, mamma, I hate it so!"

"Yes, but you know mamma can never get you to go at the station."

Marjorie blushed furiously as she followed her mother through that dreadful hotel back yard, with its two worn planks that led through a scraggly garden. This was one of the inevitable hateful rites in Guthrie.

They spent a dreary hour in the Ladies' Parlour. Etta tried to doze on the broken-down settee. The marble top of the table had a long crack. An old household magazine with a torn cover and thumbed pages lay on it. Across the road, along the edge of which stood tall dusty-looking trees, lay a vacant lot, rank with weeds, through which a little path had been trampled.

Marjorie begged for the comb and brush out of the small valise. There was a folding bed against the wall, and beside it a long mirror.

"Oh, dear me! Margie, do you have to be at your hair all the time? Leave it for a little while, and let mamma comb it before we start for the train."

"No, mamma, I can't *bear* it."

"Oh, well—all right. Goodness!"

While her mother dozed, Marjorie combed out the lengths of hair, fine and thick, a lovely brownish-black, straight, but curling a little at the end of the long braid. She tried to make it curl a little more. Her hair was longer than Jessie's and thicker than Neva's. But Jessie's hair was naturally curly, and Neva's a beautiful reddish-gold, so that she was not satisfied, in spite of the admiration of Orpha Putz and her Aunt Bessie.

She felt better after her hair was combed. She sat down in the big plush chair, that had a broken spring, and took

up the magazine. There was a continued story, and she looked eagerly through the much handled leaves to find the date so that she could look up the other numbers when she was at Aunt Bessie's, and see how the story came out.

Her mother asked sleepily: "What are you finding, Margie?"

"Oh, just a story," she said hastily.

It was a love story. The librarian at the Carnegie Library, at home, when Jessie had tried to take out *Janice Meredith,* had said: "Oh, you don't want that, it's a love story"; and she had given Jessie *Teddy: Her Book.* Love stories were tiresome, and yet enticing. But Marjorie lost interest when she saw in the illustration that the hero—although he was an artist, and wore plaid bands on his stockings—had a pointed beard. She had always said: "I never would marry a man that had a beard"; and added accusingly: "And I wouldn't ever marry you, Papa Schoessel, unless you shaved off your moustache." He said: "Why, then you couldn't give papa another moustache cup for Christmas!" They teased her for buying her father a pink and gold moustache cup at the racket store, forgetting that she had given him one the year before. But there was nothing to give him except woollen penwipers outlined in buttonhole stitch, tissue paper shaving-pads, and handkerchiefs.

She did not want to go to Germantown, or to miss Neva's party. She was ashamed that Grandma and Grandpa Schoessel were German, and lived in the country, and spoke broken English. They had come over from the old country. Neva sometimes taunted her with that, when they were "mad." Neva talked about her Grandma Birkett, who had come from Kentucky, like the Little Colonel. Neva said that her Grandma Birkett's father had owned slaves.

She wanted to be first in her "bunch," to go to boarding-school, and be like the Little Colonel. Two summers ago, she had quickly forgotten all her grievances, had had a

good time playing in the barn and the orchard, making corn dollies, taming the kittens. She was past all that now. First of all, she wanted to go to boarding-school . . . and after that, some vague splendour, being rich and living in a Southern mansion, marrying an artist or an English lord, being an artist or a musician, or a society belle.

Now her only consolations were that she had been promised a nickel to spend before they left Guthrie, and that she had been allowed to choose what she wanted for Neva.

3

Finally it was time to go back to that station and hope that the freight would come. The boys reappeared. Rich said: "Oh, they'd just been around." Buddie had spilled pop down the front of his new little suit. They had spent their nickels for pop.

The children stood on one of the benches and tried to find Buena Vista on the map, and then Shell Rock, and Wahseta where Aunt Clara and Uncle John Blossom lived. Buena Vista had two railroads. They begged for pennies and tried to get gum from the battered slot machine.

"It doesn't work, papa."

"Don't it? Well, here, here's another penny then. Try one of the other slots."

"Oh, Ed, you've given them enough pennies already."

Rich shouted: "It's a-coming! I hear it! Come on, folks, now you better get out on the platform."

"Oh, that freight'll stay here long enough for us to get on, I guess."

It was only forty minutes late. They climbed into the caboose, with its long painted benches, and the little coop where "the man," as the children called him, sat.

Buddie demanded: "Do you sleep up there?"

"What's that? Sure." The man laughed. "Ain't this a good place?"

"Sure. It's better'n a regular bed, ain't it?"

Marjorie looked out at the cornfields and the long black country road that went along beside the track.

"Don't you want to take your hat off, dear?" her mother asked.

She permitted her leghorn hat to be lifted off. She leaned her head against her mother's shoulder.

They were in time for the train at Collins. There were only Peterson, Schenke——

"Germantown!" Bud called out exultantly.

Uncle Will Risser, Aunt Lottie's husband, had driven in from the farm with the two-seated buggy. He had on a clean striped shirt and his good trousers and suspenders. He stood back on the platform, grinning, a little shy. He was a medium-sized farmer, lean from hard work out in the field, with hard brown wrists, his face sunburned to a deep leather-brown that seemed almost as dark as his black hair and moustache. His straw hat was sunburned too.

"Well, I see you folks got here."

"Hello, there, Bilhelm! *Wie geht's?* Here, you're not going to take both those valises."

"*Ach,* I can carry them."

Uncle Will's team was tied to one of the wooden posts beside the station platform. The post was gnawed, and had an eyelet through which the strap went. The hard grey earth was trampled, crisscrossed with wheel marks, with rough holes where puddles had been. The big farm horses, with massive shiny rumps and stiff black tails, stood pawing and rubbing their noses together. Rich had a mania for studying catalogues. Whenever he came to pictures of white, wavy-tailed horses, nose to nose, drawing shiny black buggies, Bud piped up: "There's Uncle Will's buggy! Rich. Ain't it?" The horses wore fly-nets of black leather brownish and rough on the under side.

Marjorie stood holding her parasol. She remembered that Buena Vista had two blocks of brick paving, and electric lights. She looked with delicate scorn at the dingy

little station and at the line-up of staring men in overalls.

The boys would not be satisfied unless they could sit in the front seat with Uncle Will and watch the driving. Marjorie's feet were tucked into the little cramped space among the valises. The two bags she did not mind, but the dreadful old telescope that mamma had insisted on bringing, because nothing else held so many things, filled her with shame. Suppose Mrs. Phillips had seen them get on the train with that telescope!

All of them knew this road "out to the old Schoessel place." Ed remembered it when it had been scarcely a road at all; but to the children it had always been as it was now. Past a few small frame houses, with barns and pumps and outhouses; a vacant lot with mustard flowers; and then the country road, greyish and narrow, rutted and hard, past farm-houses with red barns. They remembered the place where it crossed the "crick" over a wooden bridge that rattled loosely under the horses' hoofs. The "crick" was narrow, and flowed all on one side except for a spreading slimy pool that it made near the bridge—leaving a shiny swell of smooth, wet, blackish clay with little furry stagnant-water growths. Buddie cried in awe, when he saw black bugs cleaving the dark water:

"Bloodsuckers, ain't they?"

And then that place in the road, beyond the bridge, where puddles were standing long after they had dried everywhere else, and where leaves from the willow-trees, narrow and shiny and greenish-yellow, were torn by the iron buggy wheels and ground down into the smooth damp tracks.

They turned in at the farm. The narrow drive was damp, too, from the tangled grove of willows and soft maples at one side, with tiny gnats floating in the shady places. Chickens ran squawking to get out of the way in time. They drove into the farm-yard, circling the windmill, and up beside the gate.

There was a moment before Grandma and Aunt Lottie appeared at the back door, when they heard the windmill

making a lonesome tune in the country silence. The shepherd dog banged open the gate and growled until he saw that it was his own team. They got out stiffly, the children feeling strange and forlorn. The dog growled when Buddie tried to pat him, and glanced out of his dark eyes warily at Uncle Will's scolding. They saw the house white in the sunshine, with petunias under the dining-room window, and the baby trying to stand up with his little hands pressed against the bulging screen door.

Chapter II

I

GRANDMA came waddling out first. It was strange to the children to see her kiss their father, and hear her say: *"Ja, Eddie, wie bist du denn?"* They saw with awe that her eyes were moist; and they lifted their faces obediently to her soft, toothless kiss.

"Ja, den dey are all here again!"

But in spite of her tremulous beaming pleasure, she was shy with Ed's children. They had been brought up in town. They did not know German. As she waddled toward the house, her figure—corsetless, with the broad hips and shapeless waist, the puckered gathers of grey calico—was alien to them. Grandma Blossom wore a black silk dress on Sundays, fastened at the neck with a garnet pin, and crimped her flossy, yellow-white hair. This Grandma had a broad, soft, wrinkled face with gentle beaming eyes set wide apart. She wore round ear-rings; and her greyish-brown hair, thin and straight, was wound into a tight braided mat at the back of her head. Whenever it was chilly, she wore a little brown woollen shawl folded with points in the back, not quite even.

Aunt Lottie was their father's youngest sister. She looked at him with admiring eyes, and welcomed the children with shy pleasure that was like Grandma's. She carried the baby, Carlie, who turned away from the children's greetings and buried his large round head, feathered with the finest wisps of shining light hair, in the wide ruffle of her clean percale wrapper.

"Ach, he's so bashful!" Aunt Lottie said.

The other little fellow, Edwin, would only peep at them, with shy bright eyes, from around the edge of the stove.

Didn't Grandpa know they had "got here"? *Ach,* that man, he was never around when you wanted him! Grandma had been trying all day to keep him in the house, so that his clothes would stay clean; and here at the last minute he had got away from her. He preferred to come out from the barn after the visitors had been here a little while. He had never quite liked it that Ed had gone off to Shell Rock and married Etta Blossom, instead of taking one of the German girls in the neighbourhood and settling town to farming. Ed had left the German Methodist Church. Grandpa always had to act a little grumbling and grudging, because Ed lived in town and kept a store, and because he was bringing up his children to be "so fine."

But after he had been in the house a few minutes, his cautious glumness wore off. He said to Ed jestingly: "Vell, how's de business? Lots of peoples die dis vinter?" and to Buddie: "You still know vat Grandpa teach you? *Ja, das ist gut!* Dis time he teach you to say: *'Du bist ein Esel'!* Dot you can say to papa ven he go to spank you!"

"Bist ein Esel, bist ein Esel, papa!" Buddie parroted with delight. *"Bist ein Esel,* mamma, *bist ein Esel,* Rich."

"Ja, dot is right!" Grandpa said, shaking with laughter. *"Ach,* pa! Dot liddle fellow, to teach him all such t'ings! You tell Grandpa he *ist ein Esel* to teach you dot."

Buddie got along well with Grandpa. But the older children felt strange with him, with his broken speech and his bearded face.

The whole house was alien to them. The big kitchen with the range whose fire never went out; the bare dining-room with the long table, the painted floor, the high chair, and paper-holder that held a few catalogues and German religious papers for which Grandpa subscribed.

Aunt Lottie took them up the narrow stairway with its steep shallow steps. The boys had what had been the

hired man's room. Marjorie had a cot in her parents' room. It was Aunt Lottie's best bedroom. As they stood in it now, Marjorie waiting for her mother to "get a few necessary things" out of the telescope, they could hear the hot, muffled, lonely sound of a mourning dove in the grove.

"You don't need to wait for mamma, darling. You can run outdoors and see if there are any kittens around this summer."

"I don't want any kittens," Marjorie said in a faint childish voice. "I don't want to go down without you, mamma."

"Why, is this mamma's little baby girl come back? You don't often say that to mamma these days." She held out her arm, and Marjorie leaned her head forlornly against it.

"I like you, mamma," she whispered.

"Do you, sweets? . . . Come, let mamma get back to the telescope."

Marjorie, faintly comforted, stood looking out of the window. She saw the thick, uncut grass of the country lawn, with a straggling patch of lemon lilies; and then the tangled mournful depths of the grove, with the dusty ground where chickens and hogs had dug holes around the scraggly trunks of the willow-trees. Beyond that the road, and a pasture whose high rolling line was lonely and bare against the great country sky. She thought of her own room, her tree-house, the girls, Buster. . . .

She went drearily over to the dresser. It was covered with alien treasures—a pincushion of dark pieces feather-stitched together; a pin-tray of heavy frosted glass with the gilt rubbed off from the scalloped edges and a rubbed faded bouquet of painted flowers in the centre. There was just a little cleared space where her mother could set their own combs and brushes. At home, mamma always made her take her things off the dresser once a week, and clean, and put them back in order, wash her brush and comb. She thought of her white dresser with the cover of ruffled Swiss over shiny pink, the fat gilt jewel box that Neva had given

her for Christmas, the bottle of White Rose perfume with its frosted stopper. She could feel the pale glossy strands of the India matting cool under her bare feet in the morning . . . the ruffled curtains stirring, Buster barking somewhere. . . . Such a dreadful loneliness came over her that she thought for a moment she would tell mamma she was sick.

"Come on down, dear. You must try and talk to Grandma even if it is hard."

She trailed her mother down the steep stairs. Mamma's back, with the line of the slender shoulders under the thin white waist, the dark hair brushed up into a soft twist, the fine hairs at the back escaping from the tiny hairpin above the tucked white collar with its little edging of nicely ironed lace . . . it was the most familiar, the only familiar thing in the world. Mamma's black skirt, and the grainy weave of the black belt.

All the rest of the afternoon, she stuck close to her mother, sitting on the arm of the chair and touching the little crescent-shaped pin at mamma's throat. She would not play with the babies or go out to look for kittens.

2

Supper was late to-night, because Aunt Lottie was making special preparations. The great country sun was low in the sky, the sounds were different.

"Lottie, isn't there something I can do?"

"*Ach,* no, you been on the train all day. Grandma can help me."

Ed came in. He had a freed boyish look, so that the children looked at him in momentary wonder.

"I hope Lottie has a lot of food. I tell you, I'll need it when I get to it. What's she doing out there so long?"

"Sh! Don't let her hear you, Ed."

They heard Uncle Will come in and wash with a great splattering at the stand in the kitchen.

"That sounds promising, anyway."

Aunt Lottie came to the door, her thick fair hair damp, with little half-curls plastered to her forehead.

"Well, I guess you can come out now," she said shyly. And as they all tramped into the dining-room, she asked innocently: "Are you pretty hungry?"

"Oh, no," Etta said graciously, so that Marjorie blushed, thinking: "Mamma and papa are awful!"

"I got hungry!" Buddie piped up.

They all laughed, with a kind of relief.

"You're hungry, are you?" Uncle Will said.

"Yes, we have our supper earlier at home."

There was a hard scraping as they pulled out their chairs on the bare painted floor. Uncle Will was silent. His black hair was wet and showed the marks of the comb. His face and hands were dark brown against his clean shirt. The old people sat together at the end of the table and sometimes talked to each other in German, in low voices. Grandpa's teeth were poor. He concocted queer things that he could eat, soaking everything in gravy and big splotches of coffee. The hired man, a big young Pomeranian, said nothing the whole meal. He kept fiercely to the business of eating. But his small animal eyes were watching, and when the others laughed, he grinned and turned red. He had huge arms. He was too bashful to ask for anything, but he could reach half-way down the long table to spear a slice of bread. The children watched him in fascination.

"What do you want, dear? What are you looking for?" Etta asked Bud.

"Some bread. No, I can get it," he said importantly.

With just the gesture of the hired man, he took a piece of bread with his fork. Rich started to grin and was frowned upon.

Aunt Lottie would not sit down with the others to eat. She padded about the table, flushed and tired, but shyly eager to "have things nice" when Etta was there.

Marjorie ate with conscious daintiness, which her mother

was mortally afraid Aunt Lottie would notice. She did not like the thick dishes, the light blackish spoons that stuck up in a knobby bouquet from the heavy glass holder. She made most of her supper on milk, because she did like Aunt Lottie's best glasses, her wedding set. They were the colour of the lemon lilies, and had blisters and a rim of gilt.

After supper, Grandma would not let her help with the dishes, but made her run out with the boys to see Grandpa milk. "*Ach,* de big folks, dey can do all such t'ings. De liddle girl, she can run und haf a goot time yet."

The boys were interested in the milking. Buddie wanted to know: "But how does the milk get into those little things you squeeze, Grandpa? Where does the cow get it?" They liked the barn, lofty and dim.

She had liked it two summers ago. She had pretended that it was a palace, and that every stall was a different room —Blue Room, Yellow Satin Room, Purple Velvet Room— just as in the White House. She had liked the stealthy feeling of climbing into the best buggy, that stood black and shining, some cobwebs on the grainy leather top—had cautiously leaned over to get the stiff shiny whip from its holder, and flicked it, heard the sharp whirr cut through the air. She had pretended that she was driving to all the places where she wanted to go—to Europe, where Mr. and Mrs. Phillips had been, to Boston to see the church where Paul Revere had hung his lantern.

But to-night, the dimness of the barn, the worn shiny wood of the stalls with the knot holes, the muffled stamp of a hoof, the breathing and moving of the cows, the smell of fresh manure and milk and the sound of milk beating down into the pail . . . were terrible to her. She ran across the sloping farm-yard in the dusk. She saw the dark shape of the shepherd dog, and had a home-sick memory of Buster. Although he was Rich's dog, it had been she who had explained to him that they were going away and couldn't take him. She thought of laying her cheek against the rough flat top of his head, he all the time trying to turn from her

restraining arms to lick her face. "Buster, *Margie's* old Buster!" Her breath made dry sobbing noises that somehow comforted her. She could hear the lonely whirr of some machinery, and when it died down, the shrill of crickets in the damp thick grass. She could see the tall shape of the windmill all alone on a rise of ground. The grove was dark and tangled. Little birds chirped and fluttered there in the evening; in the dark hollows of the nests in the shaggy willow branches, little birds humped down together, with soft plump feathery breasts, and bright eyes staring into the night . . . the road with the weeds tall and wet. . . .

She ran into the kitchen. The lamp was lighted. Aunt Lottie had the big dish-pan on the warm stove. Mamma was wiping the dishes and Grandma was putting them away in the cupboard. Mamma was telling about Mrs. Phillips' operation. "Well, by this time she could see that the osteopath wasn't helping her a bit . . ." Grandma was interested; Aunt Lottie too, although she had to look around for more soap, say where some of the dishes were to go, watch the babies. As Marjorie listened, she saw Mrs. Phillips' house, with the cement walk curving up between bridal-wreath bushes to the front porch, the big porch rounded at the corner, and the wide shallow grey-painted steps rounded too. The murmur of mamma's voice, Grandma's pattering steps, took away the lonely image of Buster dashing happily up to their own back door with his sharp eager bark, then smelling and nosing all about the closed-up house, sitting back and giving his long piteous howl. . . .

When the work was done, they went into the parlour. Grandpa and Uncle Will came in, but the hired man sat out on the back steps smoking a pipe. The kerosene light was small and dim in the great spreading night. The grove was close, and the mourning dove moaned again.

When she went outdoors, she kept hold of mamma's skirt as they stepped along through the long wet grass, stumbling over some boards. All around was the shrill of crickets.

Aunt Lottie went ahead up the stairs with a lighted lamp.

Mamma had to push Buddie. He was drugged with sleep, poor little whining fellow. Marjorie went into the boys' room with her mother so that she could whisper, while Aunt Lottie got the lamp lighted in the front room, "Mamma, you tell papa not to come upstairs until I say I'm in bed."

There were no shades, but mamma said there was nobody to see in the country. She left her clothes in a little huddle, and climbed into the strange cot.

"Margie, are you in now?" her mother asked impatiently.

"Yes," she said forlornly.

It shamed her to sleep in the same room with mamma and papa, to hear them turning in bed, hear their low cautious intimate whispers. She flopped and gave a little moan, so that they would think she wanted to sleep, and would stop.

The big night settled down about the house that stood so lonely, so small, no other houses near it. She remembered the cows and horses stamping and turning and breathing in the great barn. She heard the solitary tune of the windmill, the crickets, and away off in a slough somewhere the sound of bullfrogs.

3

On Sunday they drove in to Germantown to church.

Even the windmill had a different sound on Sunday morning. Uncle Will clumped downstairs in his heavy best shoes that smelled of blacking. He combed his hair in the kitchen, dipping a black wooden comb into the clear, amber-coloured cistern water that had bright curving ripples on its surface as it filled the bluish-green granite basin. Aunt Lottie hurried about, getting the babies ready, trying to leave things so that she could get dinner in a hurry. Ed would not let her stay at home. The baby looked different, in a white lawn bonnet, that his Aunt Etta had brought him, tied under his fat soft chin. They could hear Grandma and Grandpa in their room downstairs, Grandma scolding Grandpa in her funny, gentle way, to make him get ready in time.

There was something pretty about Grandma as she waddled smilingly about, in her little bonnet and a German-looking dress of black lawn sprigged with white. Uncle Will and Grandpa were both solemn, with their heavy dark suits and blackened shoes, Grandpa's yellowish-white beard damp from the comb.

Marjorie would not go without her parasol. She was proudly conscious of the stiff, ironed, Sunday feel of her starched underclothes that held out the thin tucked skirt of her white dress. She had not been permitted to bring her china silk dress, because none of her cousins had anything like it.

Uncle Will had driven the buggy close to the gate. Its black wood and leather top were shining in the hot morning. The horses stamped, switched off the flies that wanted to settle upon their warm, brown, shiny flanks. They had the yellow lap-robe, in case the road should be dusty.

Grandpa and Grandma had their old buggy. Rich was to drive with them. They started first, because it took Grandpa's ancient horse so long to go, and Grandpa wouldn't hurry him. Little Edwin sat on Grandma's lap.

Dust flew up from the road under the hard, pounding hoof beats of the big horses. That little wet place had dried. There was less of the "crick" than before, and a rank stagnant smell came from it. The fields had the look of August —with the harsh stubble, the lavender-purple thistles and early greenish-yellow goldenrod, with cobwebs that were silvery in the sun.

Even in the summer, there was something bleak about the small, squarish, white frame building of the German Methodist church. Teams were fastened to the hitching-posts. The board walk creaked. They went through the little bare entry on the floor of which was coiled the hard, hairy rope from the belfry, the colour of the tarnished stubble in the fields. The wooden floor creaked too, as they marched solemnly down the aisle while the bell was ringing, the visitors conscious of all the heads that were turned to

look at "Ed's folks." The women sat on one side, the men on the other.

Marjorie disapproved of the congregation—the solemn brown-faced farmers holding their hats on their knees, the fat women holding babies and wearing such homely countrified hats. She thought of the congregation at home—ladies coming down the sloping aisles in summer dresses and silk gloves, children with big hair ribbons; of sitting down and taking the palm-leaf fans that ushers had left in the pews, or the little cardboard fans from the drug store sticking up from the hymn-book holders. The old ladies, like Grandma Cole, wore black silk dresses and little bonnets, or dresses of figured lawn with black ribbons around their waists. This church was harsh, solemn, sparsely furnished. The smell of the rope came from the bare entry.

The minister had stiff grey hair and wore silver-rimmed glasses. He had a strong German accent. Even the hymns were different—not the familiar "Sun of my so-oul, Thou Saviour dear" that went with the waving fans, the varnished pews, the light dresses, the coloured squares from the stained-glass windows and the stir of leaves outside. Here they sang "revival hymns."

> **And I knów whóm; I have beliév-ed;**
> **And am persuá-ded; that he is á-ble. . . .**

And then the muttering, guttural German prayer, all crouched down on their knees on the hard bare floor with their elbows on the painted pew seat. Marjorie had always thought it would be romantic to be a Catholic, to kneel on a prayer bench, to genuflect and make the sign of the cross—she and Jessie had done it once, had gone into the church when no one was there and "pretended they were Catholics"—but this kneeling was uncomfortable. There were dust marks on the knees of her white stockings. She gravely pointed them out to her mother, who murmured "Sh!"

The Sunday School service following was conducted in English. The voices of all the different classes talked

against one another in the small room; and in every momentary pause sounded the hard deep voice of the pastor, who taught a class of old people, like Grandma and Grandpa, in German.

The children were put into classes of "their own ages." The little girls in Majorie's class were shy, but one of them admiringly fingered her parasol and they all looked at her slippers. Most of them wore shoes, and their skirts were too long for them, their stiff little hats were perched awkwardly upon their smooth braided heads. Marjorie had had this lesson and could answer all the questions. She felt herself delicate and elegant, like the Little Colonel.

In the afternoon, some of the other relatives came over to Aunt Lottie's. Uncle Carl's family drove over from near Collins. The children, followed by five silent cousins whose Sunday shoes squeaked loudly, went through the house and out of the back door to see if any apples were ripe in the orchard. The orchard grass grew in long glossy hillocks in which little fallen green apples were nested. The children were supposed to play together; but they had little to say to one another, and divided into two camps, Uncle Carl's tribe in one, Marjorie and the two boys in the other.

4

The boys could find plenty to do. Rich went to Uncle Carl's, where they were threshing. He would not be seen again until that was over.

But Marjorie cared nothing this year about taming the wild farm kittens that hung about the barn and flattened their ears to scrape under the corn cribs. The shepherd dog was wary and stand-offish, an old dog with stiff, dusty black hair and dull black eyes. He could not take the place of Buster, with his eager friendliness and affection. She found no interest in the grove, where once she and Rich had dug up bits of broken dishes and old farm implements, and called them treasure.

Her mother was sure that Aunt Lottie would notice how Marjorie acted. She made Marjorie go out in the field with Grandpa, made her put on the old shoes that she hated so, and the blue sunbonnet that Grandma anxiously brought her. It had amused Grandpa to see Marjorie making dolls out of ears of corn, braiding their long silken hair and tying it with ribbon grass. He called: "Here is one got red hair! Dot you can fix up fine!" The corn was tall and green, with rustling shiny leaves, sharp along the edges, slightly hairy. The ears stood out angularly from stiff jointed stalks. Most of the silk was of a shining blond-green, some of it matted and dark brown at the ends. Marjorie stood on the bumpy ground, holding the ears Grandpa had given her, with their hairy sheaths that were smooth and a little damp inside. The pointed leaves of the corn made a harsh secret rustling. She thought Grandpa was lost; then she saw his straw hat, his square shoulders that had a foreign look, his slow movements as he hunted about, felt of the ears. Dimly she sensed a kind of beauty—the blue sky was in it, and the rustle of the corn, that spreading silence of the country. But she hated the sunbonnet.

She spread out the ears of corn on the front porch and left them.

Grandpa said: "I guess she don't like the dollies so goot now. *Ach, ja, ja!* Dot is de way."

She spent lonely hours in the parlour. It had a thin ingrain carpet over newspapers. When she walked across it, if she dragged her feet a little, she could make the newspapers rustle. It seemed a long way from the road, where teams and wagons bumped slowly along.

At home, her life now was divided between reading, stretched out on the matting in front of her window or curled up in the big leather chair downstairs, and being with "the girls." There was only one book here besides the catalogues and religious magazines, and the German Bible—*Life of William McKinley* that an agent had sold Aunt Lottie. She sat on the floor while she looked through the illus-

trations, printed in ugly grey tones on thin, smooth, cheap paper. But she was impressed by the men in frock-coats with satin facings on the lapels, the women with sleeves big at the top and tight from elbow to wrist, with curled bangs and psyche twists. Mrs. McKinley's hair was crimped, like the women's hair in *The Beautiful Life of Frances E. Willard* that Aunt Bessie had. She wanted to go somewhere where men really wore silk hats and carried canes. Percy Franklin was the only man at home who had a dress suit. She pored over the pictures of White House receptions; and the vague shining dreams, that made her now a girl at boarding-school, now a harpist with puffed white sleeves, now the mistress of a Southern mansion, played about them. She sat back with her head leaning against the hard smooth wall, soothed by the rustle of the breeze in the grove outside, the murmur of voices from the kitchen . . . seeing herself as the President's wife, "The Mistress of the White House," "The First Lady in the Land," wearing a pink satin dress with a bertha of point lace, and getting the President to pardon all the poor men in prisons who promised never to steal again. . . . She was drugged with a strange blissful feeling, while the voices murmured on in the kitchen, and dark red petals, velvety and withering around the edges, drooped from the dahlias on the lawn outside.

She sat down to the organ. It was of light varnished wood. She used to bring her paper dolls and make them sit out, or promenade, on all the little balconies. Sunshine fell warmly over the high organ seat and the two rows of white keys. The keys were small, a smoother white, less pearly, than piano keys, and the edges were thin and sharp. She played a little ecstatic tune. The sun flooded over her, making even her hair warm, giving her long braid a hot, sliding, glossy texture. She tried the stops. They came out with a kind of muted sucking pull. They had strange names that sanctified all the region of the organ—"Diapason," "Treble."

But when Aunt Lottie came in, she slid quickly off the organ stool.

"Go on," Aunt Lottie urged her. "There's a hymn-book on the organ. That's got some nice pieces in it."

"Go on and play something for Aunt Lottie."

All her warm bliss had died down. She was ashamed, and lonely again.

She whined: "I don't know anything."

"Why, Margie! Of course you do. What have you been taking lessons for all summer? Play Aunt Lottie the *Pansy Waltz*. You know that."

"I can't play it on the organ."

"Margie. Do as mamma says."

She had to play, angry and ashamed. She was getting, as mamma told papa, altogether too "uppish." Uncle Carl's wife said she thought too much of her clothes. Her little haughty air concealed her daze of misery. The girls were all at home without her, having parties, organizing clubs. She did not want to admit herself a part of this life here.

But Aunt Lottie worried because she could see that Marjorie was lonely. She asked a little neighbour girl, whom Grandma called "Root," to come and play with her. Ruth had tight little pigtails and bright shy eyes, like those of the wild rabbit that Rich had brought in from the field. She had never played paper dolls, and knew none of the games that Marjorie proposed—like Old Witch and Going to New Orleans. She would not answer, but ducked her head and looked bashfully away. They tried to play school out in the grove, but Ruth did not know how.

"Well, then, let's tell stories," Marjorie said. "You know how to do *that*."

She told about the girls at home, boasting a little about her house and the store, the tree-house, her china silk dress. Ruth had never heard of the Little Colonel, or even of the Little Women. When Marjorie said that it was her turn to tell a story, she ducked her head again.

"You know some story," Marjorie urged. "You have to know *some* story. Come on and tell one. I've told mine."

She only turned away her head. Marjorie kept on teas-

ing her, led on by an impulse of childish cruelty, trying to make Ruth say that she did not know a single story. After a while, Ruth got up, and with her face hidden by her arm, went slowly across the road, home. Marjorie watched her, both dismayed and defiant.

"What did you do to poor little Ruth?" her mother asked.

"Not a thing, mamma!" she cried indignantly. "We were telling stories, and I tried to get her to tell one, and she wouldn't, and then she got mad and went home."

"Well, but, Margie, she doesn't have a chance to read stories, as you do, living away out here in the country. I don't believe you were very kind to her."

"I was too, mamma. But she didn't know how to play at all. She didn't believe I had a house up in a tree, either. I have too, haven't I?"

"Of course you have. But the little girl didn't understand. Margie, mamma wants you to come up to the bedroom. She's been going to talk to you." And when they were seated on the cot, she began solemnly: "You mustn't act like this. Aunt Lottie will think you aren't enjoying your visit. How do you make us all feel? You don't act this way when we go to Shell Rock."

"Well, but I—I don't care. It isn't like this at Shell Rock. Aunt Bessie lets me play with all her things. There aren't any things here."

"Why, there's the big barn——"

"Oh, not *those* things, mamma! I should think you'd see."

"Well, I don't see why you're acting this way."

Majorie's lips set, sullenly but tremulously. She plucked at the quilt. Shell Rock . . . there were big trees there, old-fashioned houses where old ladies lived, friends of Grandma's, who invited them all to supper and served sweet pickles in little glass dishes. She didn't want to belong to the country. The grandfathers in books always were lords or dukes or squires, or lived in mansions. Grandpa had been a carriage-maker.

"This is papa's home," her mother went on. "How will he feel if he thinks his little girl doesn't like it?"

Marjorie lay forlornly on the cot. Her brown eyes clouded with tears.

"Mamma doesn't want to make you cry. But you must try to enjoy the visit like the rest of us."

Marjorie said in a sobbing whisper: "I haven't anything to do."

"You can find things. The boys are playing all the time. Can't you play too?"

"No. They don't do anything I like. And Rich is just horrible. I want the *girls* to play with."

"Yes, but the girls aren't here. Can't you play with mamma the way you do with them? Come on," mamma said with an assumption of sprightliness. "What shall we talk about?"

"Oh, no, mamma," Marjorie wailed in disgust. "You don't know how the girls do."

She had no interest except in the girls' letters. She stood at her mother's shoulder, impatiently pulling out her comb and sticking it back in, murmuring: "Mamma, won't you ask Uncle Will if he's going in after the mail to-day?"

When a letter from Neva came, she ran upstairs to her cot to read it. It was written on pink paper, in Neva's round vertical hand. Neva had remembered to put at the head of the letter "The Elms," because houses in books had names. Marjorie called hers "The Hard Maples." The letter named over conscientiously all the presents that Neva had got at her birthday party. "Japanese silk handkerchief from Winnie and Kat, the lamplighter from Jessie, pencil case from Mildred, turquoise ring from mamma and papa. . . ." Marjorie lay flat on her stomach, her chin propped in her hands. Again that dreadful home-sick feeling; and the sadness of the windmill, the twitter of birds in the grove, overwhelmed her. Oh . . . "met Buster the other day. He was out in front of the store. Hummer says he hangs around the store all the time guess he misses you." She flopped down on the

cot, dug her fingers into the quilt, and let herself go in a storm of crying. When the crying threatened to let up, she forced herself to keep at it, because she must be doing it when mamma came. She could not bear this any longer.

Mamma came in.

"Why, darling!"

"Oh, I want to go home and see the girls! I want to see Buster. It's horrible of us to leave him so long."

Her mother sat down on the cot beside her, stroked her hair, lifted the heavy braid from her hot neck.

"You wouldn't have Aunt Lottie hear you! And think of papa. Don't you suppose he wants to see Grandma a little while? Poor papa—you know how seldom he can get away from the store."

"Oh, but I can't bear it!"

"You can stand it a little longer. Mamma wants to get home too. See, you have mamma. Shall she hold her big girl?"

She nodded. She crept into her mother's lap, and they both sat in an intimate brooding silence. She fingered her mother's pin, and the two rings that she knew so well. She felt drearily far away from mamma—no one could understand. And yet mamma's lap, the tucks in her waist, her warm breast, were comforting.

Her father came into the room. He stopped uneasily.

"What's the matter?"

"Sh! Nothing. She doesn't feel very well, I guess."

Wife and daughter were alien to him.

That night Etta whispered: "Ed, don't you think we'd better be going home before long? I don't like to ask the Putzes to take care of the plants and Buster so long."

She was ready to go herself, to make sure that the plants had not suffered, to get back to the comforts of her own kitchen and of the bathroom.

Chapter III

I

THEY were back on the local again. The children began to sing out the names of the stations. "Hayfield!" "Oak Grove!" The country looked different now—the rolling land where oak-trees, scattered or in groups, marched down to the banks of little "cricks" overhung with long shiny grass.

"Byron!"

When they came to Byron, they were almost home. A little red station, a wooden platform, a vacant lot, a few scattered houses with grapevines, raspberry-bushes, chickens. Byron was the butt of all jokes in Buena Vista, the "jumping-off place." Bob parties drove there on snowy nights and bought hard aged caramels at the one store with cluttered windows. Ed Schoessel had made one of his few, quiet little jokes about Byron. He had said of Mr. Fitzpatrick, the Sunday School superintendent, who never knew when to stop: "Fitz talks all around the United States and comes home by the way of Byron." The station was desolate in the burning August sunshine. A boy with an oily face and rumpled hair was trundling some chicken crates across the hot, splintery boards of the platform. All around it stretched the cornfields, dark green, hazed over with the dusty-yellow of the ripened tops.

The children struggled for the glory of being the first to see Buena Vista.

"There it is, ain't it?" Buddie cried confidently whenever a farm-house came in sight.

"Aw, we haven't come to the culvert yet."

They knew that place. It was where the girls went running, in the spring, to look for wild flowers. The train went roaring over the wooden culvert below which was the hollow where pussy-willows were found, where there was sometimes a chilly little stream, sometimes only a bed of dry trampled sand among the weeds.

After that, they must be on the look-out for home. That great spreading cluster of dark summer tree-tops was Buena Vista. They passed the old white houses in the north part of town . . . the row of red freight cars on the switch. . . .

"Byuna Vista! Byuna Vista!"

The purple-red bricks of the station platform stretched shiny and hot. The iron railing around the plot of thick green grass in which grew scarlet salvias—the park—was burning-hot to the touch, showing the grain on the iron in a shining lustre. The Patterson House bus was backed up to the station platform, and some travelling men climbed in. There was the long walk home, carrying the valises and that beast of a telescope. Their clothes were wrinkled, their faces cindery and hot. Still, they were at home.

Ed said: "Now is when I wish we had our carriage coming for us, with a big black coachman, like that swell rig-out in Wahseta."

"Oughta had Hummer drive the hearse up to meet us, papa," Rich cried.

Marjorie begged: "Mamma, let's not go home through town."

She was ashamed of that telescope.

"Well, gee, mamma, Buster'll be at the store, I bet," Rich complained. "It's mean not to let him know we're home."

"You boys can get him when you go down for the meat."

They went home through the back streets, past the livery stable. Old Mr. Bishop, sitting out in front of the stable in a Windsor chair, called out cheerfully: "Well, got home, did ye?" The boys liked the shadowy, hot interior of the stable, stretching back and back, with sharp cracks of light,

the dark stalls with the trodden, bitter-scented litter of hay and manure partly swept from the floor, the horses that stamped hollow-sounding hoofs in the buzzing stillness.

They had one glimpse of town, imposing after Germantown, with its two blocks of brick paving and the rows of brick buildings with trimmings of iron lace.

They would have hated to pass the Phillips house, "looking like this," if they had not known that Mr. and Mrs. Phillips were at the lake. The big salmon-pink house with its wide lawn took up nearly half a block. Its curving cement walk was lined with neat bushes trimmed by the town handy man, old Jim Dake. Now all the wide shades were down.

They were on their own street, where big maple-trees almost touched leafy branches across the soft, trampled, greyish dust of the wide road, and where long shadows fell across the green lawns with aisles of light between.

They passed the little one-story house, with its snowballs and peonies, where old Mrs. Putz and Orpha lived. They could see their own big fern in the window.

"It looks fine. I knew I could trust Orpha to take care of it."

Then home. The boys had to cut through the lawn and go running out to see whether Chub Patterson had really fed the guinea pigs. But the other three trudged up the front walk.

The house stood back from the street—a good-sized frame house with a narrow porch across the front and along the south side, with a little peak with carved woodwork above the front steps. The big parlour window was outlined with blocks of red, yellow and blue knobby glass. All the shades were down, making the place dreary. There was a large barn close upon the alley, where Ed kept the hearse; but the black hearse horses were lodged now in a barn behind the store.

The painted floor of the porch was dusty, and in the corners were leaves, with faded yellow bills announcing a sale at the racket store. Etta and Marjorie stood with expectant,

tired eyes while Ed fitted the key into the lock and turned the bronze door knob. The fibre mat was pushed to one side, and there where it had been, lay its dusty pattern. The grass was long—Rich could work off some of his steam cuting that.

"Well, Ed, won't it open?"

"Sticks. I guess I've got it now."

The door trembled a little as he pushed it open.

"How closed-up this house smells! We must open the windows right away and give it a good airing."

Things were so astonishingly just where they had been left. The same hat hanging from the hall mirror—but the plants were gone from the parlour and living-room. It would not really be like home until they got the plants back. The front window without the great sword fern that was a tradition in the town—"that big fern of Mrs. Schoessel's." It was borrowed for graduation exercises and entertainments at the church. Marjorie opened the mahogany lid of the piano, and opened the little hooked door of the metronome to keep the piano company.

"How dusty everything is! Margie, we must get right at this to-morrow."

"Oh, mamma!" Marjorie wailed. "Please don't talk about dusting the minute we get home!"

"Well, we won't do any of it to-day."

Marjorie sat down on the big, stuffed leather sofa to feel its familiar springiness. The piles of *Youth's Companions* lay on the lower shelf of the table. There must be more of them at the post office.

Out in the kitchen, where Etta went at once to look around and see if any mice had been at the cupboards, there was the same little bit of a piece of soap dried in the soap dish.

She stepped out into the back yard to look at her flowers. The cosmos were all right—they could grow through everything. The blossoms were pink and lavender-pink among the tall, feathery, grey-green foliage. She had told Orpha Putz to pick the pansies. There was just one little pansy

face—her favourite, if it was possible to have a favourite among pansies—that white that was between a cream and an ivory; a pure, open, candid face with a few lines of dark blue drawn with the finest brush from the tiny hard centre of yellow and red. Buddie had thought those little lines were whiskers. He had called pansies "kitty-flowers."

The sun was hot here in the back yard, and on the dry baked earth of the garden. But still, there was something gracious, almost mellow—the heat tempered by the flowers, the house and the big barn with the board walk leading to it, the snowball and the huge maple at the edge of the lawn with the children's tree-house.

She took the one little pansy into the house, got a little bit of rusty-looking water from the soft-water pump, and set the pansy in her smallest jelly glass.

2

Marjorie ran upstairs to her own room. The pale glossy India matting was dry and smooth and slippery under her shoe soles, and its faint grassy scent was in the stale odour of the room. She tugged at the window, whose white frame stuck a little. The curtain of ruffled Swiss was crisp, and she could feel its weave and the crustiness of the little dots ironed smooth.

She had the prettiest room of any girl in town, because her father kept the furniture store. He had let her pick out her own furniture from the catalogue—the dresser and chiffonier and little straight chair of white-enamelled wood with knots of pink and blue flowers. She had to touch with her hand her little cane rocking-chair with the curlicues. She wanted to smell her own White Rose perfume, to smell the sandalwood fan, with its tassels of red and green, that lay half spread out in the folds of her china silk dress in the chest covered with pink-flowered cretonne.

It seemed years since she had seen her books. With her finger-tips she touched the back of every one. The shelves

were some that Hummer had brought from the store and scraped and painted white for her.

There were some of the Little Prudies and Dottie Dimples on the top shelf. Miss Orvis, her Sunday School teacher, had given her for Christmas *Elsie's Girlhood*. Neva said that Elsie was "a sweet character"—a phrase repeated from Miss Orvis—and for a week she and Marjorie had tried to be like Elsie Dinsmore. Marjorie had gone over to Neva's on Sunday afternoon, and they had taken a brief but sanctimonious delight in playing only hymn tunes, like Elsie—hoping that Mr. Cole would ask for one of their favourite duets, so that they could virtuously refuse. But they were indignant with the author for having Elsie marry Mr. Travilla, who was as old as her father, and whom Jessie called scornfully "Mr. Vanilla." The Little Colonel books were on the same shelf—to think that little Ruth, in the country, had never heard of them! But she had *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* together on the shelf below. Jessie liked them, but not the other girls. It was *Alice* that she wanted now. Mamma would be expecting her to come down and help, but she took the book to her favourite place on the smooth matting beside the open window. From there, she could see the hard maple-tree, and the snowball-bushes that almost hid the flat wooden top of the cistern.

But she left the book on the floor and went flying down the stairs when she heard Buster's happy, excited "Woof woof!" on the lawn outside. The boys had been to the store and got him. She knew how he had come racing; and then how he stood there, his smooth wet pink tongue hanging out over his fierce wolfish teeth—that would never hurt any of *his* family—and his liquid, black-brown eyes looking up, happy, trusting, pleading, and yet so mournful that she couldn't help answering him in a mournful, reassuring voice. "Yes, Buster. Of course, Buster." He was a young dog, part collie, part unknown. Hummer had got him out in the country for Rich.

The boys had brought him in through the parlour, the one place in the house where he was not permitted to be. But to-day they ought to let him lie wherever he pleased to make up for his having had to hang around the store all these days, not understanding where his family had gone, with no one to look after him but Hummer and Orpha Putz—old Mrs. Putz was afraid of Buster. There was something neglected and dingy about him—the same look that papa had when they went off to Shell Rock and left him to bach it. Buster's coarse, hairy brown coat had a dingy look. There were burrs wadded up in his tail.

"Aha, old fellow, you've been down to the sand-bank, haven't you?"

Hummer had told the boys that Buster would not stir away from the store, would not even go home to let Orpha feed him. The man at the meat-market had given him bones.

Marjorie put her arms around his neck, where the leather strap he wore for a collar was sunk deep into the coarse shaggy fur. He stood stiff and still, and his plumy tail, whitish along the underside, with its pathetic burrs, shook. . . . "He wanted his folks to come home. They were mean and went off and left him." His dark liquid eyes were upon her. He quivered. He "belonged" to Rich, but she was the one who never forgot him, who went out into the kitchen and sat on the floor beside him, where he had flumped down in a corner. She was indignant because he wasn't allowed in the parlour. "Buster doesn't mind it. He has all the rest of the house." "He does mind it. If the rest of us are good enough to sit in the parlour, Buster is too."

Now she made Buster go into the back yard with her. He circled and barked, and then came back to her begging for attention.

There were so many haunts—the snowball-bushes and the cistern top, the barn. The tree-house was dearest of all. Ed had had Hummer put up a platform, with a bench all around, and steep wooden stairs. Marjorie forced Buster

to go with her up the stairs. She did not want to be parted from him for a moment. He went finally with a desperate yelp, scrambling up, his blunted claws clicking on the smooth wood.

This was her own place more than any other place in the world. But it was mysterious, too. The thick maple leaves stirred against the summer sky; and there was something secret in their rustling, as there had been in the rustling of the corn. She could look down into the alley, and straight across at the upper windows of the house. Through a knot hole she could see the rough dark trunk of the great tree. Everything was different up here in the tree-house. It was where she retreated to escape from dish-washing, to console herself for grievances, to read *Alice in Wonderland*. Dreams stirred as she looked out at the trees along the edge of the walk, and down at the thick green grass.

Buster flumped down beside her, after moving uneasily about the little platform. One bright eye was warily open in the shaggy depths of fur.

3

They were going to the Patterson House for supper. There was nothing to cook with in the house, and they didn't want to stock up until to-morrow. Marjorie was pleased with the elegance of eating at the hotel. The Coles always went to the hotel for Sunday dinner, and Neva boasted of it at Sunday School. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips ate there when they were without a maid.

But old Mrs. Putz saw that they were at home and came over.

"Well, ye got home! I tell ye, I miss my good neighbours. Now if those on the other side ud go off, it'd be different. Well, I ain't seen that dog for a solid week. Orphie tried to feed him, but he went off somewheres. I told her I believed the dog missed ye. Orphie was so afraid something had happened to him, she went all over town a-lookin'.

Then she thought about the furniture store, and there she found him! What ye goin' to do about supper to-night? No, now ye ain't going to the hotel. You come over and eat with me and Orphie, have a cup of tea. No, now—it ain't any trouble. No, now you folks do lots of things for me."

She went hobbling back across the lawn. Ed always made Rich split her kindling, and he himself went over when anything around the house "needed fixing." But although the old lady had invited them, it would be Orpha who would have the supper to get. The old lady Putz had pretty slim meals. A cup of tea would not be enough for Ed and the boys to-night, after that long day on the train, and the lunch at noon. But of course they would have to go.

Etta sent Bud down town to tell his father to come back from the store, where of course Ed had had to stop when he went down to see about the mail and the water. Hummer was perfectly capable of looking after things, but Ed never thought so.

They trooped over to the little Putz house together. "The girls," Ed said with one of his rare, quiet expressions of fondness, "looked pretty nice to-night." They had bathed, and put on some of the clean summer dresses that hung in their closets. Marjorie's skin was pink from the country sunburn, and in spite of all her grievances, it looked as though the visit had agreed with her. It was "good to get out of valises." They were beginning to realize that they were tired, had had a hard day of it. The excitement of homecoming was dying down.

Still, it was pleasant crossing the wide lawn in the late afternoon sunlight, all of them clean and refreshed, through the long shadows of maple-trees.

Mrs. Putz' small parlour, with its dark old furniture and queer odour, seemed homelike to them. They could smell the "cup of tea" that was brewing in the kitchen. If it wasn't enough, the boys could go to the drug store afterwards and bring home some ice cream.

Chapter IV

I

MARJORIE simply could not wait until she had seen the girls again. She had to help with the dishes the next morning, but she complained so about the dusting that her mother let her off if she would promise to do it in the afternoon.

"But you won't want to do it any more then than you do now. I know you, Marjorie."

"Yes, I will too. But I can't wait all that time to see the girls."

"No, I suppose not. Although you might think a little of mamma left with all these things to do alone."

Marjorie's lips came together rebelliously. She flew up the stairs and then down, and out of the front door, which banged just a little, not enough so that she could be called back and told: "Mamma's not going to let you go at all if you go that way."

She was troubled at the thought of deserting mamma; but she soon forgot that as she skipped eagerly down the walk, conscientiously hopping over the cracks.

She was going to Neva's. She had more fun with Jessie sometimes, even with Kat. But Neva was the one who counted. When there were quarrels, the girls took sides either with Neva or Marjorie. Neva and Marjorie had started into Sunday School and kindergarten on the same day. They had begun taking music lessons at the same time, and they played duets at the recitals that Miss Delano had her pupils give. They were rivals in everything—in their clothes, the relative length and thickness of their hair, their

dolls, their possessions, their houses, their music, the merits of their fathers' stores. The friendship between them was alert, wary, jealous and yet tight.

Neva's house was square and white, with a porch with stout white pillars and a shining blue-painted floor. It was newer than the Schoessel house, but it had fewer rooms and the back yard was small. Mrs. Cole had more hand-embroidered things in her house than any other woman in Buena Vista. But Marjorie's furniture was superior to Neva's. The girls had taken sides when they were playing London Bridge at recess. "Which would you rather have—Neva Cole's little gold chain and pearl ring, or Margie Schoessel's white-enamelled furniture?" Marjorie's side had won by two.

First of all they had to look at the presents that Neva had got at her birthday party. None that the other girls had given had cost more than Marjorie's present—a picture of two little Dutch children, in a gilt frame, that mamma had let her select at the store and take over to Neva before she left.

"This is what Mildred gave me, and this is what Winnie gave me, and *this* is what mamma and papa gave me!"

The turquoise ring was nested in its little square, shiny, white box between two tight folds of panne velvet. Marjorie admired, secretly setting against it the cane rocker that papa had let her choose for her last birthday.

She was silent when Neva complacently showed her the crisply folded length of blue sash and the bright ten-dollar gold piece from her Grandma Birkett. She knew that Grandma and Grandpa Schoessel would never give her anything like that.

"Grandma sends me a ten-dollar gold piece every birthday," Neva said. "Now I've got over a hundred dollars in the bank."

"I've got some in the bank, too."

"How much?"

"I don't know how much. I'd rather get things than have it in the bank, anyway."

She had to listen to Neva's account of the party, and the maple ice cream. She did not say much about her visit, because Neva thought it was nothing to go out in the country.

"What did you do when you were away visiting?"

"Oh, lots of things."

"Did you go to any parties?"

"No, not any parties. But Aunt Lottie had some girls over to play."

"*Didn't* you? Grandma Birkett had a great big party for me when I went there, and she had a woman in to serve."

"Aunt Bessie always has parties for me."

"Why didn't your Aunt Lottie have one?"

"Well, I guess she would have if we'd stayed longer. I guess she was going to."

"You were out in the country, weren't you?"

"Yes, but then, we went into town. My uncle's got a great big two-seated buggy. It's as big as Mr. Phillips' surrey. And then Grandma and Grandpa have a buggy, too."

"Listen, kid, I've been thinking. When I grow up I'm not going to have a surrey. I'm going to have one of those great big high traps with yellow wheels like papa saw in Chicago."

"I'm not going to have a surrey, either. I'm going to have a phaeton."

"What's a phaeton?"

"It's what they drive in English books. A girl did in a story I read at Aunt Bessie's. With dear little ponies and blue reins."

"I think a trap's lots more stylish."

"*I* don't."

She had been so eager to see Neva. And now it was all back again—the straining jealousy, the wariness, the hurts. She remembered all the things with which Neva taunted her when they were "mad"—that her Grandma and Grandpa

couldn't speak good English, that her father cut open dead people; and she could think of nothing mean enough to say back to Neva. These things were in the air now. Neva was not going to let her be ahead because she had gone away. She wiggled restlessly.

"Let's go over and get Jessie."

"Oh, she never can come out and play. She always has to work."

"Well, then, let's get Kat."

"I'd rather have Mildred."

"I wouldn't. I'd rather have Kat."

Neva gave in graciously, as she could do sometimes. They found Kat, and then all three ran over to Marjorie's to play. The flying feet and eager voices sounded first from the walk and then from the stairs. They tried different ribbons on their hair, and then tiptoed into the guest room to look at the two fans—one of black spangled gauze and one of white feathers—that were folded away in a drawer.

2

Marjorie could scarcely stop long enough to eat dinner.

"Well, the girls are coming over again, mamma," she said.

"Yes, but you know you have to do that dusting, Marjorie."

"Well, mamma——"

"Yes, you do. Doesn't she, papa?"

"You must help your mother first."

"Well, I'm *going* to. But I want to be through when the girls come."

"Eat your apple sauce, Marjorie."

"Don't want it. I'm full," she called back from the parlour.

"Papa, that child hasn't eaten a thing. She can't think of anything but the girls—she's just possessed."

"Oh, well, she'll get over it."

Marjorie flew about the parlour, hoping that mamma

would not see that she had left the picture frames and the little dust pattern under the Battenberg doily on the fern stand. Mildred and Neva came first, and she heard mamma say calmly: "She'll be out just as soon as she's finished her dusting." But she knew that mamma would let her off from the dining-room. The sideboard took so long.

The girls were waiting out on the lawn. They cried at once:

"What shall we do?"

No matter where they started, they always ended by playing at Marjorie's. They never went to Jessie's. The Evans house was dark and cluttered, with ironing or baking going on with which Jessie had to help. The little ones tagged them. Winnie's mother was a widow, and they lived in a small house at the end of the street. Mildred's father was the station agent and the Bushes had only a rented house. At the Coles', they always had to be so careful of how they handled Neva's things. Mrs. Cole had blamed Jessie once when one of Neva's little gilt cups got broken. There was no place like the Schoessels' back yard, with the tree-house and the thrilling terrors of the barn where the big hearse stood.

Here on her own ground, Marjorie had the supremacy. But it took very little to make it veer toward Neva. Particular as Marjorie was about her clothes, storming if Minnie Clapsaddle did not get them exactly right, Neva's were always a little better than hers. The lace on Neva's dresses was sewed on by hand. She could wear patent-leather slippers and white stockings, because she never spoiled anything. Neva's big blue bows were always "just so" upon her smooth shining hair of pale red-gold. She had a little haughty air. She talked about her Grandma Birkett. She had been to Chicago three times, and to the Pan-American Exposition where President McKinley had been shot. She wore a bracelet on her little slim, white wrist with its soft smooth skin, and a fine gold chain around her neck. She

had four rings, three of them with sets. She was an only child.

But Marjorie had the underclothes that Aunt Bessie made her, to set against the things that Grandma Cole made for Neva. She got the highest marks in school—except for Mary Monroe. She was always on the program at school and at Sunday School. When her grade presented scenes from *The Lives of the Pilgrims* at Thanksgiving time, she was Priscilla and Neva was only Barbara Standish. She was Mrs. Phillips' favourite of all the girls; and she was the one who could choose what other girl should help her tell the ladies where to put their wraps at Mrs. Phillips' reception.

"Let's go down town," the girls were saying.

But Marjorie and Kat declared that it would be mean to go off before Jessie came. They wanted to play out in the yard, but Neva and Mildred wanted to go indoors and play with some of Marjorie's "things." Winnie would not say which she wanted to do, and so they had to count out. The yard won, but Neva and Mildred said they would go home if they had to play outdoors.

"Let 'em go, kids," Kat cried excitedly.

But mamma would say that she ought to do what her company wanted. Marjorie said reluctantly: "You two can go in, then, and we three'll stay out here."

"Can we play with your things, Margie?"

"I don't care. Only you can't play with my little blackboard. I don't want any of the pictures on that erased."

The little blackboard was one of the dearest of all her things. It had a handle that turned a roll of black paper on which were pictures in white to be copied—first, circles and cubes, then horns and tops, and then horses and dogs and kittens chasing balls, and at the end of the roll, people. Marjorie and the girls scorned the cubes and balls—what papa called "the idea of the blackboard"—and, except for a few unsuccessful attempts at the kittens, skipped straight to the people. Ladies were what they liked to draw, and

many little girls so that they could use all the colours of chalk for hair ribbons. They did not like the old-fashioned ladies in bustles and fur collarettes on the roll, and instead drew fanciful portraits, with ribbons and ruffles and plumed hats, labelled—in round, vertical writing—"Neva C.," "Marjorie Elizabeth Schoessel," "Jessie."

The Schoessel family believed that Marjorie had "quite a talent for drawing." She tried fairies with pink ballet skirts and wings. Aunt Bessie had been "quite an artist" —had painted bunches of flowers on satin cushion covers, and an oil painting of cherries that still hung in the Schoessel dining-room. Neva's drawings were stiff, with corkscrew curls and fearful necks. But sometimes, stuck with gleeful impudence around the edges of the other pictures, were impish little drawings that Jessie had made when the others got tired of the blackboard. The bald head and spectacles scarcely needed the faint, naughty scribble underneath: "Mr. Fitzpatrick." There would be just the whiskers and ear-tips of a mouse. Aunt Bessie exclaimed: "Jessie, you surely ought to take lessons!" But Jessie never enlarged these drawings.

The reason that Marjorie would not let the others use the blackboard now was because she and Jessie had drawn two fairies before she went away and had said that if those fairies were erased before the first of September, they would have bad luck for a year.

"Can we play with your dolls?"

"You can play with my little dolls. But not my big dolls, because I've got them all dressed to go down town."

"Come on, Mildred," Neva urged. "I know where her little dolls are."

They could have fun enough with the little dolls that came from the drug store—those with striped stockings painted on their chilly bisque legs, with jointed arms, mops of matted blond hair, tiny eyes that flew open with a sudden stare. Marjorie had beautiful pieces of gold and silver picture-frame moulding from the store that could be

used for settees. One of the travelling men had sent her a whole set of little-doll furniture: three chairs, table, piano, glued to the floor of a pasteboard room with brightly coloured walls. It was an advertisement for a wholesale furniture house, but Marjorie had cut a rug of shiny red paper from a catalogue to cover the lettering on the floor. Now the girls found other treasures—samples of wall-paper borders, with great crusty sprawls of gilt that smudged a little under their thumbs.

"Oh, look, Margie!"

"I know it. Hummer got those for me."

"Oh, aren't they *dear!*"

"You can have one."

"To take home with me?"

"Yes. I gave it to you. Both of you can have one."

"Oh, gee! I know what I'm going to do with mine. But I won't tell until it's all made."

"Kid, what makes you give them those?" Kat whispered.

Jessie came at last. They ran into the house to get the dolls, all packed carefully into the reed buggy.

"I'm going to stop in at our store," Neva said. "I want to see papa."

The girls agreed solemnly. Neva always got nickels from her father.

The jewellery store was wonderful, with its clocks of bronze and marble. The girls liked the cuckoo clock of a dull, smooth, woody brown, carved all over like a little Swiss house, with the tiny bird that Neva said could open the door and step out. Below the door hung weights like pine cones. "I could set it going. I know how to make him come out," Neva said. "But I dassn't." But Mr. Cole would not let them play in the jewellery store. They could only lean, very lightly, on the glass counter, whispering which they would choose of the rings and watches and stickpins in the wooden trays lined with purple velvet.

"Come on and let's go to the store," Marjorie said impatiently.

"Come on, kids, let's. We can have more fun there."

The furniture store was one of those brick-front buildings. But the building itself was a rambling wooden structure with a yard at the side where furniture crates were piled, and boxes of excelsior. The undertaking rooms were at the back.

Hummer was out in the yard opening some crates. They all marched out there.

"Well, well, well! Lookit here! See who's coming!"

Hummer had been at the store ever since the children were small. He had come from Pomeroy, but had lived so long at Mrs. Elder's boarding-house that he seemed to belong there. He seemed old to the children, and at the same time they claimed him as one of their own tribe. He had long, curving, oily locks of brown hair parted in the middle and a wide grin.

"Hummer, haven't you got any satin or anything?" Marjorie demanded.

"What do you want of satin? Going to get married?"

"No! I should say not! I want a new doll dress."

"Oh, so that's it! You ain't going to marry me right away then?" He winked at the other girls, who giggled.

"I guess I'm not! Nor ever, either."

"Oh, now, don't say that, Margie, you'll make me feel bad. Winnie will, though." He squeezed Winnie as he passed her. She pouted and struck at him; but her soft bright eyes looked at him from under the thick white lids, and her smooth lips had a little secret smile at the corners.

"Well, let's see. There ain't been many funerals."

"You've got *some*thing," Marjorie cried impatiently.

Hummer always saved her the scraps of satin and lace from the coffin linings, to the envy of the other girls. He went into the undertaking rooms and came back with a few pieces of catchy satin, pearl-grey and white, with bits of white and lavender ribbon from funeral bouquets.

"I've got something else, though, if you tell me you'll marry me."

"I won't tell you. You've got to give it to me anyway."

"My! Ain't she proud! Winnie wouldn't treat me that way, would you, Winnie? All right, here it is."

"Oh, Hummer! Oh, goody! Where'd you get these?"

It was a little bunch of hard glossy flowers from a made wreath.

"I bet those came from old Mr. Blake's funeral," Neva said, snippily.

"I don't care if they did. They'll look just perfectly dear on my little doll hat for Amy."

The children knew that fascinating odour of dust, wood, varnish, paint, rope. The went up and down the narrow aisles, "choosing" each a desk, a table, a chair, away out to the back of the store where the kitchen furniture was kept. Centre tables were set on top of other tables, the legs wrapped in excelsior and reddish-tan paper tied with hairy twine.

But Marjorie and Neva wanted the same desk. It was the most beautiful thing in the store. Its shining mahogany held dark pools of light from which their eyes were reflected mysteriously. The lock was of curlicue shape, and there was a tiny gilt key. It was like the key in a fairy-story, or like the one that the White Rabbit had left on the little table in Wonderland. The girls stood with frightened looks while Neva and Marjorie argued.

"Neva did say it first—just a tiny bit first. I heard her."

"Yes, but it's Marjorie's father's store."

The little desk—the little *key*—she could not give them up. Neva could have first choice of jewellery, but she had first choice of furniture.

On rainy days they liked to climb up into the gallery—"upstairs in the furniture store"—and sit there, Marjorie and Jessie together, tucked in among the bedsteads. They looked through the railing, and whispered and giggled about the customers. Jessie dropped a gum wrapper on Mrs. Bradley's stiff velvet hat with the stick-up. When Hummer called up from below: "B'lieve I hear mice up there in

the gallery, guess I'll have to come up," they snuggled down, bright-eyed, trying not to giggle. The rain fell in a steady pattering on the roof, and they could smell the wood and dust, and the dampness outside.

But it was not raining to-day. They went out into the yard. Neva and Mildred were "mad," and stayed in the store. A favourite game was to play house in the piano box, with Bud for whatever male adjunct to the household was needed—father, husband, child, rich uncle from Australia. For a week, Marjorie and Winnie and Rich and Chub Patterson had kept a post office in a pile of boxes out here; but they had to give it up because Hummer found one of the letters.

Rich came into the yard now. He liked Winnie, although he wouldn't say so even for a forfeit.

"I ain't afraid to go in and lie down in a coffin and go to sleep," he boasted. "Want to see me?"

"I bet you don't."

"Bet I do."

He went into the undertaking room. The girls could never be coaxed in there, even by Hummer, who offered them gum and nickels. But now they wanted to see if Rich was really doing it. When they ventured timidly beyond the door, Hummer shouted: "Whoop! *Look* out!" They fled with shrieks. "Why, girls, what you scared of? There's only tools in that box." When they peeked in, fearfully, a few minutes later, Rich lay at full length in a coffin. His eyes were closed, and his sandy lashes lay upon his freckled cheeks. His lips were tightly shut.

"He's asleep."

"Honest? Do you think he is?"

Then Winnie began to cry. Rich had to get up from the coffin.

"It was all right. I was pretending. Come on, Winnie. Don't cry," he urged. "Gee, that ain't nothing to be afraid of."

Every Saturday, either Rich or Marjorie got a nickel for

polishing the brass on the hearse. Jessie was the only one who would even go into the barn where the hearse stood. But it was a pleasant summery feeling, sitting up there on top of the big hearse in the yard, under the thick maple leaves, the brass things catching the warm glint of the sun. The hearse, the harness and woolly black tassels for the horses that hung in the barn, were a part of the family life. All summer, Buddie had been holding funerals in the yard, begging for bits of broken china for tombstones and making pilgrimages to the drug store for empty candy boxes. He actually seemed pleased when one of Orpha Putz' little chickens died. "Well, now I can have another funeral," he said cheerfully.

"Come on!" Rich cried. "Let's not stay here any more. Come on, Winnie." He marched boldly ahead with Winnie, not caring that Jessie sang softly behind them:

> **"Richie Schoessel, so they say,**
> **Goes a-courting night and day . . ."**

Neva and Mildred had gone off "mad." But it did not matter. They met Chub Patterson on the street, and that made six to play without "those girls."

They played Pilgrims and Indians in the back yard. The girls were Priscilla Alden and Rose Standish and Mistress Bradford. Buddie had to be Peregrine White, the Pilgrim baby. Rich and Jessie and Chub Patterson were the Indians.

"I ain't going to be any old John Alden," Rich said with scorn. "Chub and me are Indians. Whoop! Look out for my tommy-hawk!"

Buster circled and raced, barking wildly when he thought his own charges were in danger.

3

Coming home from the store together—Marjorie, Neva, Mildred, and Jessie—they played their favourite game of all,

acting out the characters from the Little Colonel books. The books belonged to Marjorie, and so she had first chance to be the Little Colonel. Next to being the Little Colonel, it was most fun to be Eugenia, who was rich and haughty, and could wear fine clothes. Neva chose Eugenia. Mildred was Betty.

"What have you got on to-day, Eugenia?" Mildred asked eagerly.

"I've got on a yellow satin dress with a wide lace ruffle all around the bottom, and yellow silk stockings, and yellow satin slippers with gold buckles, and a big picture hat with a great big yellow ostrich plume that curls all the way around it. Oh, yes, and I've got on long yellow kid gloves too!"

"So've I!" Mildred cried enviously.

"No, sir, Betty can't wear the same clothes as Eugenia's."

"Well, then, mine are blue, but all just the same things."

Jessie always spoiled things by acting silly. She said she would be Tarbaby, the Little Colonel's pony, or else Hero, the Newfoundland dog. She circled and barked right on the street; and when Buster, who had accompanied them, stood waiting at the corner, she barked at him and pretended that she was a dog, too.

"You can't be that, Jessie. Buster's Hero," Marjorie cried.

"Well, then, I'll be Tarbaby. That's more fun anyway."

While they were all mincing proudly along, in their silk dresses with slippers and stockings to match, Jessie ran out into the road and galloped and tossed her curly black hair. There was at the same time something gleeful and lonely about Jessie galloping down the long dusty road under the big trees.

"We must practise talking Southern," Marjorie said, "the way the Little Colonel talks. You mustn't sound your *r*'s when you're talking Southern. You must say 'mothuh' and 'fathuh' and 'you-all'; and you must call door 'dough.' That's the way the Little Colonel does."

They practised solemnly, in chorus.

"Moth-uh, will you please shut the *dough?*"

Jessie scampered about in high glee. She sang out:

> "Mothuh, if you will please shut the *dough*
> I won't ask you any *mough!*"

The girls cried in exasperation: "Oh, Jessie, you're so silly, you spoil the whole thing!"

It gave them a delicious feeling, romantic and aristocratic, to "talk Southern." Marjorie and Neva planned that when they went away to boarding-school, they would make people think that they had always talked that way. Neva wanted a tortoise-shell manicure set for Christmas because that was what the Little Colonel had. In secret, Marjorie and Kat agreed to call John Berry and Harold Jefferson, two boys in their grade, "Rob" and "Malcolm," from the Little Colonel books. Then Harold Jefferson was caught teasing Buster, and Marjorie would have nothing more to do with him.

Marjorie went on alone from Mrs. Phillips' corner. She was still being the Little Colonel, all by herself. She played, going up the walk, that it was a great avenue between locust-trees, that the house was a Southern mansion with pillars and a gallery, that Mrs. Doolittle, washing down in the basement, was a darky mammy. Her eyes shone and her cheeks were a hot pink. Buster was Hero, the Red Cross dog (not that Hero, or any dog on earth, could be really better than Buster). The hearse horses were Tarbaby and Betty's pony. The parlour was the big drawing-room at the Locusts, and she was going to pretend that there was a harp in the corner.

She met her mother in the hall, bringing up fresh clothes from the basement.

"Why, Margie, have you been running? What makes you so hot? Did you remember the soap?"

"Oh, no, mothuh deah," she trilled.

"Why, Margie! What makes you talk like that? It

isn't nice to make fun of mamma when she speaks to you."

She cried hotly: "I wasn't making fun! That's the way the Little Colonel talks! Oh, mamma, you don't see *anything!*" She ran wildly upstairs and slammed the door of her own room.

But there was a difference that she felt in books, although she did not know how to name it. She liked to take the Alice books up into the tree-house. They gave her a queer dreamy feeling. The rabbit with his watch, and the glass door that Alice could never open, the little table, the garden. . . . She felt the same thing when she read the parts of *David Copperfield* that she liked (curled up in the big leather chair and munching soda crackers). About the rooks and Canterbury, Agnes' little door in the panelled wall, the house that had been a boat, and David's little bedroom. It was the feeling that she had had for a moment when Mrs. Phillips' niece had played a minuet. She remembered the sunlight on the light polished floor with the rug of greyish-white bear fur that had a silvery cast, and the plant of yellow tulips on the broad window-sill. It was the feeling that the leaves gave her, rustling about the tree-house where she sat alone. And then there was a secret game that she used to play, in the lily-of-the-valley bed near the corner of the porch, when she pretended that the cobwebs stretched filmily over the grass were fairy washings, and that the waxy green-white blossoms on the bending stems were fairy dinner bells and school bells.

4

She had not played in the tree-house yet. But she kept that for special times. None of their other tea parties were like those in the tree-house, when they made mamma and Aunt Bessie and Mrs. Cole climb the steep stairs and sit on the narrow benches. When they played house there,

with Bud and the dolls, it was different, a kind of fairy housekeeping. It was perilous, up there so high above the grass and the flowers; and yet there was a wonderful magic security.

The boys liked to go up there in winter, to scoop up the soft snow and throw it at some unsuspecting delivery team coming slowly through the alley. They tried to hit old Mrs. Putz' chickens when they ventured out into the little yard to peck at the cake of ice with grain frozen in it, in their granite pan. But papa had said that in summer the boys could not go into the tree-house without Marjorie's consent. The barn loft was theirs, where they had hung the trapeze. The tree-house was Marjorie's.

She would not let the girls go up there very often, either, only as a special treat. Once she and Kat had taken up the little tea-set that Aunt Bessie had sent. That was one of the best plays they had ever had. They had pretended that the tree-house was a hotel; that Buddie, with his velocipede, was an engineer going off to Byron, Oak Grove, Des Moines, Chicago; and that they must have his meals ready for him when he got back. He pedalled at top speed around the block, Buster following. While he was gone, the girls, murmuring confidentially together, made soup in the little cups, water flavoured with clover blossoms and the juice of maple "squirters."

"We've got to make him eat it," they told each other.

When Buddie came back, announcing importantly that he had been to the White House and seen the President, the two waitresses placed the three small, gilt-rimmed cups of maple soup on the bench, with paper napkins saved from the last missionary meeting. "Now, we've all got to taste this, or we'll never get to come up here again." Solemnly they raised the tiny cups to their lips. A little film of dust floated on the soup. It strained through the clover blossoms that nearly filled the cups, brushing their lips with honey-scented petals, tasting of bitter maple juice and

faintly, mysteriously, of dust. The sun shone through the maple leaves in splashes upon the wooden floor. When they set down the cups, clinking in the little saucers, they looked at one another. They felt that they had performed some rite together; and they always kept this game a secret. It was called "T. H. M. S."

But this was almost as good a time, sitting up here with Jessie and telling secrets, on the Saturday before school began. Now the leaves were getting dry, and the flowers down below had hot, autumnal colours.

"Do you believe in the devil?" Jessie asked. "Harry Ryan says if you believe in God and Jesus, then you've got to believe in the devil."

Jessie said that if there was a devil, there had to be a Mrs. Devil, too. She described Mrs. Devil so that Marjorie begged her to stop.

They both believed that heaven was "somewhere," that it had beautiful streets and houses and trees. Perhaps if you could go through this hot blue sky, as Alice went through the looking-glass, it would be there. They saw it vaguely in blue and white and gold. Angels had curls, and wore white robes, with great wings that were curved out like chicken wings and were all made of feathers instead of spangled gauze, like fairy wings.

Still, you had to die to get to heaven. It was impossible that anyone whom they really knew could die.

"I'll tell you," Marjorie said. "Let's both marry English lords and live in two castles real close to each other. Will you?"

"Oh, I suppose I might consent to marry an English lord."

"No, but really. I mean it. If we do, then I'm going to name one of my children Violet, and the other Cynthia, and the boys Cedric and Desmond. What are you going to name yours?"

"Oh, I haven't decided yet."

"Yes, but Jessie, you've *got* to decide."

"I've got to go home now, or one of the kids'll be tagging here after me."

She was happier still after Jessie went down, and she was left alone there with Buster. She felt remote and hidden among the high leafy branches, looking down upon the pink cosmos. . . . She wanted to play the harp when she grew up, like the Little Colonel's grandmother, Amanthis. She pictured herself wearing her hair parted in the middle with two curls over her ears and a knot fastened high with a tortoise-shell comb, wearing a white gown with a high waist and puffed sleeves, sitting beside a casement window. . . .

Sometimes, she and Jessie thought they would like to be one of the tomboy heroines, who always hurt her back and was told that she could never walk again, and then was cured at the end by a great specialist—like the heroines in the Gipsy books and the Katie books and *Jack and Jill.* Sometimes they were hurt saving the lives of other girls who had scorned them, or told lies about them. They were made saintly by illness. She saw herself lying on a sofa, pale and with her hair floating, and all the little children of the neighbourhood clustered around her while she told them beautiful fairy-tales with a moral.

But if she did that, she could not go to boarding-school. It was time now to set the table, but mamma did not know where she was. She did not know whether she would be like the heroine, or like the girl in *The Three Margarets,* who climbed out of the window at night, and got into scrapes, but was noble at heart and wrote the best composition. In boarding-schools, there was a strict but kind head mistress, an unjust homely teacher who sneaked about the halls, and a kind, beautiful, young teacher; midnight spreads; and hiding under the bed when the unjust teacher came in. There was one girl who stole the heroine's composition and got the prize, and then later confessed when the heroine had saved her life.

Boarding-school led into that vague, glowing world of

elegance and wonder where there were castles and Southern mansions, harps, servants, and ball dresses, and always a far, shimmering beauty.

If an even number of people went down the street before she counted to twenty-five, she would marry an English lord; if an odd number, then she would marry the President.

Chapter V

I

THE girls stopped for Marjorie on the first day of school. Then they always went together "in a bunch." They wore fresh summer dresses and their best hair ribbons.

"I've got to stop in at the store," Marjorie said.

She went up to her father, who was getting out some new rugs and hanging them on a long wire against the wall.

"Papa, I want some money."

"What's that for?" he asked mildly.

"Why, school, papa!" Marjorie cried impatiently. "I've got to get new tablets and pencils, and everything."

"How much do you have to have?"

"Oh, I don't know. Enough to get things."

She ran out of the store, exultant because he had given her more than she needed, as papa always did. She and Neva were the ones who could always buy popcorn on band-concert nights, and go into the side shows at the Fair. She wasn't going to get any of those brown penny pencils, but one of the long, coloured, nickel pencils with a big eraser.

Town was full of children. The placid summer look, when the trees stood thick-foliaged and still, and teams from the country made the only noise, was gone. There were shouts, groups of little girls going along sedate and self-conscious and important, with their new tablets and pencil cases. Until now, it had been summer. But all at once, in the rustle of the trees along the walk with their fading September look, in the long-drawn sound of cries from the school yard, fall had come.

The drug store was full of boys and girls. They crowded around the table that was stacked with tablets of all sizes. Marjorie picked out a tablet with thin, Japanesy paper and gold lettering on the cover, scorning the scratch tablets. New school books, with crisp pages that smelled deliciously of the drug store, filled the shelves.

They went down the long tree-lined walk to the school, Kat facing them and skipping along backwards. Jessie had had to go earlier and take one of her little brothers to the first grade. They could scarcely stand the importance of their new tablets and pencils, their freshly starched dresses, the thought of being in the seventh grade. Only when some of the eighth-grade girls passed them, going along laughing and taking up the whole walk, the seventh-graders hid their sense of inferiority under an air of cold scorn.

Neva said: "This year, kids, let's all stick together and not let any of the country kids into our games."

"Oh, Jessie'll go and ask some. You see if she don't," Mildred said bitterly.

"Well, she can't. Or we won't let her be in our bunch any more. Kids, listen here." They drew around Neva. "If that Gertie Scovil or that Ella Boots come around this recess, and want to play with us, we're going to all not say a word, but just walk right off and leave them."

Marjorie said nothing. She could not help thinking of Gertie Scovil, with her homely face and eager eyes—"What are you going to play this recess, kids?" Gertie Scovil lived across the tracks in the other part of town. She brought her dinner in an old lard pail; and once she had stolen an apple from one of the country children.

"We'll let some more play with us," Neva said, "but we're going to say who can and who can't."

They went up importantly to the red brick schoolhouse, with its black fire-escapes. The two stone steps leading to the big front door were worn down in the middle. The wide sloping playground was trampled bare and hard in places, with a line of tall, dusty-looking trees along the sidewalk.

They were on the third floor this year. The stairs were worn smooth and shiny around the nails. The railing, below which was a kind of wainscoting, had the dark stain rubbed off, smoothly, along the edge where all the hands touched. From the square window at the landing, they had a queer little view of the tops of hats bobbing up the front walk to the door. A little girl from the country came timidly behind them. The consciousness of her, lonely and wistful, made their eyes brighter and their excited voices shriller. When they went into the long narrow cloakroom, the little girl hung back timidly and waited until they had chosen their hooks before she took off her stiff summer hat, with a scalloped brim, and hung up her dinner pail. They knew that she hoped they would let her go into the strange schoolroom with them; but they were a "bunch," and must all go in together.

They had new seats, with unfamiliar views from the long windows, strange inkwells, different initials carved on the desks. Sitting at her desk, looking at the wonderful new teacher, Marjorie prayed in secret, in a sudden tremor of fear, hoping but doubting that it would come true:

"O dear God, I pray Thee, please let me get above ninety-five in everything, even arithmetic, and do not let Mary Monroe get higher marks, I pray Thee. And oh, please, dear God, let John Berry sit across the aisle."

She blushed hotly.

2

There was no recess that day. But going home together, in a tight cluster, they talked excitedly about the new teacher.

"Oh, isn't she pretty! Do you suppose her hair's naturally curly? Kids, she wears a rat, because I saw it when she took out one of her hairpins. Kids, to-night after school, let's all wait for her. Let's not let any of those other kids get ahead of us."

The new teacher had written her name on the board—"Miss Battles." They had learned from the list of teachers in the paper that her first name was Vivian. That took the place now of Violet as Marjorie's favourite name, and Evangeline as Neva's. They adored everything about Miss Battles—her tiny waist, held snugly by a leather belt; her pompadour, lofty, tight on the sides, and with two little curls that hung from the figure 8 at the back of her head. They hotly contended that the curls were real and not pinned on, as Miss Battles' landlady's daughter said. They all brought flowers to Miss Battles; and when the garden flowers were gone, Marjorie begged a bouquet of ferns and geraniums from the plants.

Miss Battles went with Percy Franklin, the cashier in the First National. Rich and Chub Patterson scoffed at Percy Franklin, but the girls secretly admired him. He was the only man in Buena Vista who wore white flannel trousers and a dark coat, like the heroes in magazine illustrations. When Percy Franklin took Miss Battles out driving, he hired the yellow-wheeled trap from the livery stable.

Marjorie and Neva, instead of being Amy and Laurie, or Rob and the Little Colonel, when they came home from Sunday School together, were Vivian Battles and Percy Franklin.

School was different, because of Miss Battles. They did not have their old readers, but paper-covered copies of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Pumpkins and autumn fields and Ichabod Crane's schoolhouse . . . it all mingled dreamily with the September air that came from the open windows, the movement of tree-tops against the blue sky, the faint enveloping hum of study, the smothered giggles from the corner where Jessie sat across the aisle from George Rooney. Singing came up from the room below. There came the twittering, and then little sharp hopping steps of a bird on the stone window-ledge from which trailed withering vines. . . . Miss Battles sat at her desk, and her dark brown eyes looked softly into the distance. . . . Before, Marjorie had

liked her reading because she got above ninety in it. There had been only a few selections in the readers that she really wanted to read—*The Daffodils* was one. But this was different. All the phrases were dreamy with the sense of autumn, the smell of apples and the sound of crickets, the Van Tassels' house standing mellow and firm and cool in the sunlight, like that old limestone house on the road near Shell Rock.

She wished Miss Battles would call on her for the paragraph describing the Van Tassels' house, or that funny one about Ichabod Crane looking like a grasshopper on the farmer's horse. Even the boys liked that. But now she would not beat the air wildly with her hand. She was suddenly shy, and looked at Miss Battles with entreaty. But she had known that Miss Battles would call on her.

"That's *very* well read, Marjorie. Isn't it, class? I wish Mr. Prosser could have heard this instead of the reading he heard yesterday."

All the class turned around and looked at Marjorie. She felt proud, with tears behind her drooping lids, and her hands trembled. When she got home, she hung about the kitchen, following her mother when she went to get water from the shining faucets. She wanted to tell what Miss Battles had said, but she could not. There was a row of jelly glasses on the kitchen table, filled with pinkish-amber apple jelly. Mamma had got some rose-geranium leaves from Orpha Putz to flavour it. Everything was too beautiful, she was too happy. She loved the whole kitchen, with the sunlight coming in through the screen door. She held a little broken furry leaf of rose geranium against her cheek and caught its fragrance. She ran into the parlour, pranced about, and then played *The Dance of the Shepherds* very fast on the piano.

It was something more than the reading. It was the songs, too. She scorned the old pleasure that she had had in motion songs. The new one that Miss Wessel, the music teacher, had just given them, sang in her mind as

she opened her window at night and fastened back the dotted Swiss curtain.

> **Last night the nightingale woke me,**
> **Last night when all was still.**
> **It sang in the go-olden Moonlight**
> **From out . . . the woo-oodland hill. . . .**

The solid leafy branches of the hard maple-tree, on which one branch was a frosted ruddy-gold, troubled her with their mysterious stirring in the evening air. It was like the verse that she remembered, and whispered to herself from the old reader—"I wandered lonely as a cloud . . ." There was a queer pain in this happiness.

She looked different in the mirror—plumper, and with pinker cheeks. Her hair, when it was brushed, floated up in a fine, shining mesh. She knew that she was more terribly particular about her clothes than she had ever been, and that she had nearly driven Minnie Clapsaddle wild the last time Minnie had come to the house to sew. For years, she had been wanting golden hair and hazel eyes, like the Little Colonel. But Miss Battles had brown eyes. John Berry liked her hair, because he was always trying to pull her braid, and once had stuck two pencils through it like Japanese hairpins.

3

There was new excitement and delight in playing Tin-tin. The girls used to give names that were "jokes"—like Ivanhoe Atwater and Guy Wiggins, and Dan Parker the town drunkard. Now Marjorie was always secretly hoping that she would get the name of John Berry. She was angry when they gave her Chub Patterson, and it was over a year since she had stopped liking him.

Miss Battles took the whole room to Reeds Grove one night to gather autumn leaves to decorate the schoolroom. The sumach along the wood road was crimson, shadowed over with purple, and the clusters hung from it smudgy-

dark. They opened the wooden gate into the Grove. They ran about scuffling through the rustly, fallen, brown oak leaves and the broken twigs. The creek had an autumnal look, with the soaked brown leaves at the edge of the clear, cold water. The old stream bed had made a gully down the hill-side, lined with a mat of oak leaves with muddy holes where the cattle had stepped.

Neva and Mildred had spoken first to walk beside Miss Battles. Marjorie was with Jessie. But she was aware of John Berry all the time. She pulled away from Jessie and went to the edge of the creek.

"Oh, just look at the water!" she cried vivaciously.

She knew that John Berry was coming up behind her, but she did not turn her head.

Jessie called: "Margie!" She stood still a moment; then gave her head a little shake, and scampered back to join the other girls.

"I'll show you where there's some nuts," John Berry said. "I been in here lots of times."

"All right."

They climbed up the hill by a little cattle path that was strewn with leaves. Their shoes sank into the soft mould, and little sticks cracked stealthily under their heels. The trees grew tall and close together, yellow hickories among the oaks, and the red woodbine smouldered close to the ground. Among the thick leaves, they found a few of the small hard white nuts. There was a faint scent of nuts. Their hands rustled the leaves, touched once or twice. The voices of the others sounded mournful and distant.

They heard someone call: "Where's Margie?" It had a wailing sound coming from far away among the trees.

"They don't need to call us," John Berry said.

Marjorie was kneeling among the leaves. All the nuts that he found he put into Marjorie's pocket. Then he picked up the long brown braid of her hair and kissed the curling end.

"Margie! Where've you gone?"

"I'm coming!"

She ran down the little path, jumping when she came to the end. All the rest of the afternoon, the feel of John Berry kissing her braid burned deliciously in her secret mind and gave a magic to everything she did. She could catch again that faint scent of nuts among dry leaves.

Perhaps some of the boys had seen. Or perhaps John Berry had told—if he had, she hated him. At breakfast, a few mornings later, Rich grinned maliciously and then softly whispered: "Good morning, Mrs. Berry." Marjorie sat scarlet-faced. She did not want "the folks" to hear, and could only whisper angrily: "Good morning your own self, *Mr. Winnie Johnson!*"

She could not bear to be teased by Rich and Chub Patterson. That time in the woods had been a secret. Now she hated John Berry. He changed his seat for the drawing-lesson, pretending that he could not see the pitcher and glass that they were copying, and took the vacant seat behind Marjorie. But she would not turn around when he twitched her braid and tickled her neck with his pencil. She would not have his name in Tin-tin. She tore up the paper hidden in her burnt-wood glove box on which she had once written:

JOHN BERRY hate
MARJORIE SCHOESSEL hate

JOHN ARTHUR BERRY love
MARJORIE ELIZABETH SCHOESSEL marriage

4

Miss Delano had for a long time been the only music teacher in Buena Vista. She roomed at the house of an old couple, and kept her upright piano, and her music stand, in their old-fashioned parlour where she gave lessons. Sometimes she ate with them, sometimes she made herself a cup of tea on a little one-burner oil stove in her own room.

She ate bakery macaroons out of a paper sack, had headaches and doped herself with headache pills. She played the organ in the little Presbyterian church, played the same pieces over and over again with the rippling accompaniments that she improvised for everything. *Moonlight on the Waves. The Old Mill.* She was tall, drooping, anæmic, and wore a little white shawl even in the summer. Marjorie dreaded the touch of her chilly fingers. Sometimes she was half asleep from the headache pills; and while Marjorie played, she sat and dreamily counted, going on even after Marjorie had stopped.

The visit to Germantown had been a good excuse to let Marjorie "stop taking." When she came back, she went to Miss Davison instead.

Miss Delano had praised no matter what she did. Miss Davison was strict and knew when she had skipped her practising. She did not give easy little pieces from the musical magazines, but made Marjorie stick to her exercises; and she would not permit the broken chords that Marjorie had learned from Miss Delano.

It was dreadful not to have a teacher approve of her. Marjorie got the highest marks of any girl in her room, except Mary Monroe, and had the principal part on all programs. She began to work, half angrily and half desperately. Gradually, she began to take a pride in Miss Davison's few words of approbation.

Then Miss Davison took the place of Miss Battles in her secret worship. She never thought of taking flowers to Miss Davison, or begging for her hand. Miss Davison had studied at the Boston Conservatory of Music. She was young, with soft blond hair and small nervous hands that were very strong and limber. She was not so lusciously pretty as Miss Battles, with her dark eyes and her pompadour. But even Percy Franklin was not good enough for Miss Davison. No one in Buena Vista was good enough for her—only an author, or an artist, who wore knickerbockers and a cap and carried a brier pipe in his hand.

Miss Davison gave her lessons in the old back parlour of her parents' home, a room with high walls, long shuttered windows, and an archway painted white. The Davisons were old settlers. In her mind, Marjorie was always comparing this house with Mrs. Phillips'. Mrs. Phillips' house was the largest in town. But in a way, she liked the Davison house better. The walls of the music room were papered in a pale apple-green, the ceiling with a faint silvery design that was like spider-webs. Marjorie felt a secret warmth in her heart whenever she saw the grand piano of dark shining wood. While she played, a vine outside tapped the glass; and she was aware of the grapes that hung in heavy clusters among the large green leaves on the trellis outside. She was aware of Mrs. Davison, with her black silk dress and her silvery hair held with little shell combs, going softly about in the big parlour. She loved the long windows there, and the black marble fire-place on the mantel of which stood a gold clock in a crystal case that was like a bubble of water. The chairs had oval backs rimmed in dark polished wood with thickly carved foliage at the top.

There was a mingled delight and strain in going up the straight narrow walk to the Davison house, with her music in the new black leather case.

Once Miss Davison played a few bars of her exercise for her. The notes stood out, each one alone, but all together making a kind of shape in the air above the shining piano. It made her think of the minuet. She went away troubled, puzzled, eager. She began to spend more time on her practising, to sense an austere pleasure in her exercises. Those few bars of music stayed in her mind, precise and visible, on a kind of shimmering background.

She did not like the simplified version of the Chopin Nocturne that Miss Davison gave her. It was hard, and she thought that no one would want to hear it.

"Aren't you getting anything out of this, Marjorie?" Miss Davison asked. "Try it again this week, and then if you can't do anything with it we'll put it aside."

Marjorie blushed with shame at her failure. When she tried to practise again, she sat for a few minutes looking at the music in angry despair. But it was not like her other pieces. She did not understand it, but she did not tire of it. Little parts, little phrases, began to take on a meaning. It was as if she had stood outside, and it was polished and hard and blank; and then a door pushed open, she could see inside, could go in deeper and deeper. . . . It was music. When people played softly or loudly, they didn't just do it because of little marks above the measures. They meant it. Her breathing was troubled. She could scarcely bear the quiver of two bars of sunshine on the familiar parlour floor. The room with the sunny windows, the plants with their faint fresh odour, was all filled with sudden beauty.

She wanted her music lesson to come, and yet she was afraid of it. She had a secret that made her exult and yet deeply shamed her. When Miss Davison called for her Nocturne, she stumbled a little over the first bars. Then all at once she knew more than she had ever known before, and the playing was easier, a kind of singing.

Miss Davison sat down in a big chair in the corner. When Marjorie stopped, she said softly: "Well!" Marjorie's cheeks were burning. A strange new elation had come over her.

She ran home very fast after her lesson, scampered up the porch steps and into the house. She could not tell anyone. But she called out, to ease her feelings:

"Oh, mamma, isn't supper ready? I could eat everything in the world."

The family were troubled when she did not want to play one of her old duets with Neva when Mrs. Cole entertained the Missionary Society. When there were callers, she would not play *Pansy Waltz* or *Monastery Chimes* even for an encore.

This new passion for her music took the place of her secret love for John Berry. Now she thought she would play the piano instead of the harp. She forgot about boarding-

school for a time, and planned to study in Boston, like Miss Davison. Boston stood, classic and white, in her imagination, with somewhere a great room in which there was a grand piano on a polished floor. Then she could come back, wearing different clothes, and with her hands very slim and strong. Perhaps she would have an Eastern accent and not sound her *r*'s. But she would come back only for a little while, until all the people whom she knew had seen her. John Berry would see her, remote and far above him.

PART II

Chapter I

I

THE girls met after school and went down the walk, five abreast, avoiding Winnie because they were not sure that they wanted her in the club. They went to the Schoessel house. Marjorie ran in ahead of them.

"Mamma, you mustn't come into the parlour while the girls are here," she ordered. "This is an important meeting. We have to organize."

The girls threw their coats and tam-o'-shanters on the hall seat. Marjorie carefully closed the parlour doors. Outside, it was crisp November weather, with dry leaves blown rattling across the cement walks; but it was warm and still in here, with the faint moist odour of the big fern.

Kat and Jessie curled up together in the big leather chair. Neva frowned at them, and they both giggled.

"Let us open the meeting with prayer," Jessie said. "Sister Cole will lead us."

Neva looked proud and disdainful. "Girls, we've got to be serious," she said. "Jessie, you've got to stop acting crazy."

"Why, I *was* serious——"

"Oh, Jessie, please! Or we can't get a thing done."

"All right," Jessie agreed. She folded her hands and looked very solemn. But it was a great event for all of them, for they knew that they could do nothing unless they were "a bunch"—"Neva Cole's crowd," as the other girls in high school were beginning to call them; or "Marjorie Schoessel and those girls." They wanted to be like the older girls,

the J.U.G.'s, who had first rights in the cloakroom and around the mirror, powdering and roughing up their short hairs; whose voices were loudest in the halls and down the wide cement walk; and whose names filled the columns of jokes and locals in *Ripples,* the high-school magazine.

"Now first of all we've got to decide who's going to belong," Neva stated. "I think we ought to organize with just the ones that are here."

"What about Winnie?" Jessie demanded.

Instantly there was tension in the air. It was plain that the meeting was secretly divided into two camps—Marjorie and Kat and Jessie on the one side, Neva and Mildred on the other.

"Well, do we want Winnie?" Neva asked virtuously. Mildred murmured.

"Winnie's always gone with us girls, ever since we started into school."

"Yes, but we've got to think of the club. I don't see that Winnie would add anything. She runs around all the time with that George Rooney."

"I don't care. I think Winnie ought to have a chance to belong."

It was decided to put the matter to a vote. Bud was sent down town to buy black and white jaw-breakers for ballots, with the promise that he could eat all there were left.

While he was gone, they tried to decide upon a name. The girls looked to Neva and Marjorie to propose these. When Neva suggested "The Right Girls," Jessie and Kat demurred.

"Margie thought of a lots better one. She said 'The Six Sisters.'"

"Yes, but that would mean we'd have to have Winnie," Mildred cried.

"Well, let's vote on the name, too."

Neva wanted them to be known as "the nicest crowd"—the one that was asked to serve at church suppers and re-

ceptions, and to have a booth at the Martha Washington Bazaar. She said they must be careful whom they let in—everything depended upon that.

And in a way, Neva was the leader now. She was tall, and wore a wire rat that made her reddish-fair hair stand out in a smooth roll all around her head. She wore a girdle, and separate waists and skirts. There was an elegance about her slim figure with the flat hips, her fine-skinned aquiline face, her long satiny-smooth hands on one of which she wore a silver ring with a matrix. Other girls tried to copy her jabots of fine lace and her bows of stiff malines. But none of the others could ever get "the look" that Neva had.

Marjorie pleaded for a girdle, but it had been decreed that she must wear a Ferris Waist until she was sixteen. Mrs. Phillips said that a rat would ruin her hair. She spent moments of agonized dissatisfaction before the glass, trying to make her skirts lie smooth over the hips like the older girls', and stuck out her tongue fiercely at herself because she hated her clothes. Minnie Clapsaddle sewed her waists and skirts together as if she were still a little girl in the grades. But she had persuaded Minnie to make her a separate belt. She cold-starched it herself, and the feel of the thin sharp edges made her exultant.

Bud pounded on the door. "Here's your jaw-breakers!" he shouted. "If you don't leave me some, you'll never get me to go anywhere for you again."

"Oh, Bud, you're an angel."

When they voted on Winnie's name, there were two black balls in the old domino box that they had converted into a ballot-shaker. Neva declared that that settled it, but Marjorie and Jessie contended hotly that they "had a majority." For a time the club was in danger of breaking up before it was organized. Then Jessie sucked her ballot until the white coat was worn off, leaving the pink one underneath.

"What does that mean?" Neva demanded.

"It means that I say let's eat up the darned ballots and go merrily on!"

After that, they giggled and would not be serious, to Neva's disgust. Jessie and Kat proposed the names of Ivanhoe Atwater and old Jim Dake for membership. They voted for Marjorie's name for the club, and Neva gave in graciously, as she could do on occasion. Neva said that they must take a pledge to "look after each other's interests," and that they must have pins, like the P.E.O.'s, to mystify outsiders.

"Come on, let's go down to papa's store and order our pins."

They scurried on with their coats and tams, Marjorie calling back impatiently: "I'll be back pretty soon, mamma!" The outside air was brisk; and they could feel, going down the walk together, the importance of their organization. They looked eagerly through the shiny pages of the catalogue at the jewellery store. Neva wanted round gold pins with S.S. in raised letters. Jessie wanted only the little fifty-cent pins with the letters engraved. Marjorie sided with Jessie. She knew that Jessie could not afford the gold pins.

But as they left the jewellery store, Neva said softly: "You know, I almost wish we didn't have Jessie in the club. She spoils lots of things."

Marjorie flushed deeply. She was loyal to Jessie, but she had really wanted the other pins that everyone would admire.

"Come on, let's stop in at the store," she urged.

They tramped excitedly in together.

"What's all this?" Hummer demanded facetiously.

"Don't you know who we are?"

"The W.C.T.U.?"

"Oh, Hummer, you're so crazy! You'll see when we get our pins."

"Oh, tell me now!" Hummer begged.

He tried to make them think that he knew what the initials meant.

"You do not!"

"Yes, I do, honest! I heard what you girls were saying up in the front of the store when you thought I wasn't around."

"We weren't talking about that—so there!"

"I heard something, all the same. Anyway, Margie here talks in her sleep. Her father heard her yelling out the name of that club last night, and he told me what it was. Sure!"

"What was it, then?" they demanded derisively.

"I believe it was 'The Six Sweeties.'"

They laughed hilariously, but frightened because Hummer had come so close to their secret. Hummer's teasing added deliciously to their feeling of excitement and importance. They demanded something from him, and he brought out five sticks of Tutti-Frutti from his vest pocket.

"Why don't you get married, Hummer?" Kat asked him. "You're so nice and handsome."

"Ain't I, though!" Hummer retorted. "Well, I tell you, all the S.S.'s are still in school, and they're the ones I want."

"Oh, we'll stop school for you any time, Hummer!" Jessie cried vivaciously.

"Aw, they's too many of you. You're all too good-looking. I couldn't choose."

"Why, you can draw lots for us, Hummer!"

Some people had come in from the country to buy a sewing-machine. The girls stood aside, but they knew that the woman, in her heavy coat and grey fascinator, was looking at them enviously. They tossed their heads a little, and moved their shoulders, as they marched back to the front of the store, and let the heavy door slam behind them. The air struck cold and fine against their flushed faces; and even the little worry of trying to think of some reason to give Winnie for not having had her at the first meeting could not spoil the glory of swinging down the street arm-in-arm.

2

Neva had brought the new pins to school with her, nested in tissue paper in a small shiny box. The girls met in a corner of the cloakroom, shivering a little with eager excitement. Neva fastened the pins on their waists conspicuously over their hearts. Jessie had worn a dark dress and her pin wouldn't show. They waited in the cloakroom until the gong sounded, and then they all went in together. Neva sauntered coolly to her desk, but Marjorie felt suddenly hot and self-conscious. She slid quickly into her seat and bent to get out her rhetoric. All the other girls were looking.

The S.S.'s waited in the corridor and went up to their first class together. Girls were looking enviously and suspiciously at them, and boys whispered teasing comments going past their desks.

Neva said complacently, at noon: "Everybody noticed."

There was an item about the new club in the next issue of *Ripples*. Some of the Freshman girls started another club. But their pins were only the little enamelled Dutch girls that were being given away at the hardware store by a coffee-demonstrator.

Now they were together more than they had ever been; and girls like Ella Boots, and Susie Belle Biggerson, did not try to walk home from school with them. They went after school to Marjorie's or Kat's to make candy; or to the store to work the player-piano, stopping on the way to look at the goods in Patterson's window. Even on Sunday they must meet. After dinner, Marjorie was restless. She said that she was tired of reading. She knelt on the window-seat on the landing, pressing her hot forehead against the chill glass. When the telephone rang, she made a dash for it.

"Mamma, it's the girls. They want me to go walking with them."

Sometimes they left Jessie out of these walks, because her dingy old coat and last year's hat spoiled their feeling of bright, exciting splendour.

There was that Sunday feeling in the air. They met groups of boys and of other girls out walking. The snow was melting, running in bright little rivers down the cement sidewalks. The crossings were trampled masses of slush. Percy Franklin drove along in his rubber-tired buggy, and there was a splattering of brown water and melting snow. The branches of the trees were bleached against the spring-like blue of the sky. The girls felt so warm that they wanted to wear their spring jackets; and then all at once their feet were cold in their best shoes and shining new rubbers. A cloud went over the bright sun. They decided to go into the Schoessel house and get warm; perhaps play the piano, or make sea-foam.

When her father and mother went to lodge, Marjorie had one of the girls stay all night with her. They made candy with the boys in the kitchen, and got the lights out just before the grown people came home. Then they talked half the night, listening tensely when they heard a stir in the front bedroom, turning to smother their giggles in the pillow, one drowsing off and the other lying bright-eyed and wakeful, until at last both were asleep.

3

But meetings and candy-making—even wearing colonial costume and distributing little hatchets and cherries at the bazaar—were not enough. There was a new unvoiced excitement thrilling under everything. The girls were conscious of it—in the shining of the long windows in the assembly room; walking home, arm-in-arm, through the chilly spring air with its scent of fresh mud; in the half-hour of music on Friday mornings, when seats were changed, when boys' and girls' voices were blended in *Anchored* and *Out on the Deep*. There was a constant expectation, a wild craving for "something doing," that they had to assuage with candy-making, with hilarious giggling together.

Marjorie began to see that the girls lingered about the

house when Rich was there. They treated Bud just as always—sent him on errands, tried to mystify him by calling things only by initials (he had long ago solved the mystery of Pig Latin). But Winnie and Kat, even Neva, were different the instant that Rich came into the room. If they could hear the things he said about them sometimes! Any girl who could be silly about Rich Schoessel! He was now a rather tall, slender boy with a thin freckled face and sandy hair, thin deft hands; quick in his studies, irritable, exacting, yet dependable. Marjorie had no illusions about Rich. Bud was her darling. All the same, she took a deep silent pride in Rich; her life was wider, stronger, different because she had him. She did not want him to go with Eva Leland.

Eva Leland (who pronounced the Eva with a short *e*) was a year ahead of Rich in high school. She had gone with most of the boys of her own age and a few older men, and now she was turning to the younger boys. Eva boasted that she had gone with every boy in high school that anyone wanted during her first two years. She had been very pretty, with fluffy yellow hair, and a bright red sweater and cap. But now her face was thin. Young as she was, the skin was dry, even a little lined, and showed the powder as her mother's did. There was a hardness and a kind of age. But her vivacity carried her along.

Rich did not speak of her at home—he never was confiding, like Bud. He was himself—self-contained, sharp-tongued, active. But he had lost his interest in basketball, and he did not care much about his old books and his hobby —that all people should train themselves to be ambidextrous. He wandered off with Eva after school, instead of going with Chub Patterson . . . down to where a wooden sidewalk was built out over a little creek, past the old power house.

The girls did not like Eva Leland, and yet they were envious. The J.U.G.'s were a "wild crowd." Mrs. Phillips said that it was a scandal how they were permitted to carry on in high school. All the same, it made Marjorie rebellious

and angry at times that Rich could go to Byron on bob-rides, and even to town dances in the Armoury, and that she was always "too young." Neva might say that there was not a single really nice boy in their class in high school; but all the same, it was not enough to keep birthday books and hold meetings. The meetings of the club grew more secret, more hilarious. In the Christian Endeavor, the girls whispered to one another and turned scarlet with suppressed laughter. They scampered home together; and the cold starlight, the wintry air, made them skip, and suddenly run out into the road, and stand shivering and giggling at corners.

Marjorie and Kat began to take a fascinated interest, under pretended scorn, in the high school "couples." They followed Kat's older sister, Avis, when she went home with Deek Davis from the Christian Endeavor; and when Deek self-consciously changed sides at the corners, Marjorie changed, too. Avis turned and said angrily:

"That's all right, Kat Wilcox, but just wait until I let mamma know how you act on the street on Sunday night!"

They both giggled.

Kat and Marjorie and Jessie confided to one another that just having meetings was too tame. Neva was so afraid that everything wouldn't be "nice." They began to slip away and go to the furniture store after school.

"What shall we do to have some fun?" they demanded feverishly.

Papa and Hummer had a funeral, and Marjorie had promised to look after the store. It was raining, and there were no customers. The telephone was in the little cubby-hole between the front and back parts of the store.

"I'll dare you to call up Louie Bassett," Jessie said. "Listen, kid. Now this is a real dare. Call up Louie Bassett and tell him he's a fool."

They shrieked with wild laughter.

Louie Bassett rode a bicycle with green wheels. He had very curly hair, and his eyebrows were almost invisible, the

plump flesh below them pink as if he had been standing before a roasting-fire. There was nothing against him except that he had a high voice, and his mother told everyone what a good boy he was. But Rich and Chub Patterson could not think up adjectives biting enough to express their scorn of Louie Bassett. The girls refused to have his name when they played Tin-tin. They felt a deep and ruthless joy in being cruel to him.

Marjorie trembled as she took down the receiver. The girls waited, smothering their giggles, and listening in mingled exultation and horror.

"Oh, girls, it was simply awful! He was way out in the shed fixing his bicycle, and his mother had to call him in."

The girls shrieked. A wild joy filled them. The best thing of all was that Louie Bassett would never dream it was *Margie Schoessel* who had called him!

"You've got to do something, too," Marjorie cried. "Listen. Now these are real dares. Jessie's got to call up Susie Belle Biggerson and say that she's Glenn Dale, and Kat's got to call up Glenn Dale and say she's Susie Belle Biggerson."

"Kid, I can't, I can't! What shall I say?"

"You've got to tell him you want him to come over."

Glenn Dale and Susie Belle Biggerson were in the girls' class in school. They had come in from the country. Glenn Dale was small, solemn, important. He played the flute in the high school orchestra. His hair curled in a thin dangling ringlet over each eyebrow. Susie Belle Biggerson had flat feet; and although she was only a Freshman, she wore her hair in a tiny knob on the top of her head.

Kat was frightened and slammed up the receiver. But she and Marjorie stood hugging each other joyously as they listened to Jessie.

"Hello. Is this Miss Susie Belle Biggerson? Do you know who this is? Oh, don't you? Why, this is Glenn Dale."

"Oh, help! I can't stand it!"

Jessie's eyes were round as she turned away from the telephone. "Kids, she honestly thought it was Glenn Dale! She was *tickled*—can you imagine it?"

"Maybe it was mean," Kat said suddenly.

"It wasn't, either. I don't care. I believe God meant those two for each other."

"Why, Jessie Evans!"

There was shame, happiness, guilt, as they planned together. The front door opened. It was not a customer, but Marjorie's father.

"What dreadful things are all these girls planning?" he asked jestingly and innocently. "Well, have you been keeping store? That looks as if there'd have to be a treat, don't it?"

He gave them each a dime. They thanked him solemnly, but when he had left they laughed wildly and clutched each other. And afterwards at the drug store where they were spending their dimes for Willis Specials, they could not look at one another without starting to giggle again.

4

But there was a relief, a coming back to the same old self, when Marjorie went with her mother to see Mrs. Phillips. Going up the curving walk in the fresh March twilight, she took her old impressed pleasure in the big salmon-coloured house with its trim shrubbery: in the living-room with the light, polished floor and the screen of fancy woodwork in the doorway, the fur rug, the fire-place with its two varnished pillars and green tiles, the faint scent of heat from the long gilded radiators. Mrs. Phillips was large, imposing, rustling in her dress of dark green silk, with the gold chain of her glasses that was always getting tangled in her P.E.O. pin.

While her mother and Mrs. Phillips conversed in low voices, Marjorie went softly over to the curio cabinet. She looked again at the shells, the little carved wooden bears from Switzerland, the wooden shoe, the Italian mosaics and

filigree. Mrs. Phillips had said once that Marjorie should go abroad with them sometime. She saw herself crossing some foreign square, with a music case, and stopping to feed the pigeons near a stone-rimmed fountain. . . .

"That child certainly has an eye for things," Mrs. Phillips said complacently. "I see she'll have to go to Europe some day."

When she was a young woman travelling in Europe, her life would all be beautiful and girlish, as Mrs. Phillips thought it was now. She would never do silly things, like calling up Louie Bassett, or lingering in the hall so that Roy Martin, a big Senior who was "tough," would sing out, "Hello, Peaches," as he went by.

Now she always demurred when her mother wanted her to go over and see Mrs. Putz and Orpha. But in the parlour, square and dark, with the bay window filled with plants on the sill and on green-painted brackets, she was even more her old childish self. All her girlish envies, defeats, tense desires, were soothed by the unfailing admiration of Orpha Putz and by Mrs. Putz' approval.

The girls said: "I should think you'd hate to look at that side of her face."

But she was so used to Orpha that she seldom thought of the great scar that covered one side of Orpha's face and neck. She had heard her mother tell how it had happened. Orpha had been dressing to go to a party, and the kerosene lamp had exploded while she was curling her hair. But it was like a tale of someone whom Marjorie had never known —Orpha must always have had that scar, and worn the same queer high-necked dresses.

She was her familiar self, too, when she was at the store, running out to see the new rugs that had just come in, going into the yard (from which the old piano box had been hauled away for kindling), and listening to the faint sound of the boxelder leaves.

Chapter II

I

THE girls waited for Mildred, who had to play the closing march in the assembly room. Then the S.S.'s went together up the wide staircase to the English classroom where the first Junior meeting was to be held. They came in laughing, bright-eyed, pretending almost successfully that they did not care. But they had been talking it over beforehand, gathered into a tight little knot in the cloakroom; had urged excitedly: "One of our bunch has got to get an office."

They were beginning to be "the" crowd now—the ones who took possession of the cloakroom, who crowded about the mirror and had the best hooks. They felt that they owned the big brick building with the wide cement walk leading up to it, the elm-tree at the corner, the clanging gongs, the assembly room with the long windows and rows of scarred desks.

A group of country girls and of town girls who were not "in things," a few serious-minded youths and the "jokes" like Glenn Dale and Ivanhoe Atwater, had come conscientiously early. They were the ones who looked forward to class meetings and class parties, and to Christian Endeavor socials, for their opportunities. They had been talking things over, too, deciding "who to vote for for president"; but when the important members of the class came in, they sat back warily humble, faintly resentful. They had found a kind of vicarious excitement in talking over the girls who stood a chance of election; and they, too, had been clustering together, trying to urge one of their number to commit

the courageous act of proposing a name for nomination. They could not disport themselves in easy attitudes about the room; but they had a vote.

But there was a new friendliness in the room before the meeting began. They realized themselves as a class. Individuals came into dramatic prominence when they were "up for office." Proud ones were now conciliatory, nervous under their pretence of nonchalance. There was jesting back and forth, even among the rows of solemn boys all seated together for moral support. They called one another by their surnames with an assumption of manliness.

"Oughta brought your flute along, Dale, opened the meeting with music," someone called.

The high-school heroes, the basketball-players—football had been put out of the Buena Vista schools on petition of the mothers when Chub Patterson had broken his leg—strolled in just before the meeting began. They slumped down in their chairs, carved their initials in the desk arms, called out facetious warnings. They wore sweaters banded about with convict stripes, corduroy trousers carelessly rolled above their shoe-tops, bumpy-toed shoes. Some of them had long locks like Hummer's, that hung below their eyebrows, but now most of them were getting the pompadour cut. The backs of their heads were shaven and shorn, with naked-looking wrinkles, a clipped greyish plush of hair, and square-cut bristles standing up from the forehead. They put their hands in their pockets and stuck out their long legs with their ankles crossed.

The S.S.'s kept together, talking and laughing, "fooling" with their schoolbooks. Although they all said: "This was the only thing I had to put on to-day," they had saved their most becoming dresses.

The election of officers came first. Of course Harry Ryan wanted to be president. He had been studying a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order,* and he felt that he was the only one who knew how to preside. But he wanted the office too much. It was Fish Carter who was elected. Fish—a big,

lounging, good-natured, loosely built boy—had "flunked out" in a number of his studies, and was always on the verge of suspension. But he was the most popular member of the class. He was the best guard on the basketball team; went with one of the most prominent girls in the older crowd; "cut up" in classes; was second only to George Rooney upon the four o'clock list. *Ripples* was full of jokes about Fish Carter.

Now the class approved when he said: "Aw, I don't know how to lead any meeting." He had to be pushed to the presidential chair, and sat there good-naturedly grinning. The boys flung admiring sarcasms at him, and he received them with a grinning, disarming simplicity.

"Hey, Fish, that ain't the way to put a motion!"

"Well, how do you do it, then?"

"Take him away!"

"Aw, shut up, now, fellows, we want to get ahead with this meeting."

Ray Bender said: "Mr. President, I move that Mr. H. G. Ryan be given the office of adviser to the president!"

"Yah, make him prime minister!"

They all laughed, pleased with the chagrin of Harry Ryan. But Harry could not keep from "sticking his oar in," as one of the boys disgustedly muttered—from jumping up and making motions and corrections in his quick, nervous voice. He was made sergeant-at-arms, half as a joke; and he took even this office with intense seriousness.

When the time came to elect the vice-president, the girls looked flushed and self-conscious. Some of them began to whisper vivaciously. Others were silent. This office meant more to the girls than that of president to the boys; for the boys were satisfied with the larger honours of basketball. The vice-president was the one who made the speech at the Junior-Senior banquet. She had social privileges, and would meet in important conclaves with the other officers.

Marjorie's face was hot. She pretended to be interested in the pictures that Jessie was drawing on the fly-leaf of her

geometry. But when she took the pencil to add moustaches to the portrait of Mr. Prosser, the superintendent, her hand was not quite steady. She heard Susie Bell Biggerson—who had been the first to arrive at the meeting—whisper to one of the other girls in the back row: "Margie Schoessel—you get up and nominate Margie Schoessel." She felt a rush of warm, amazed gratitude to Susie Bell, a shamed memory of their telephone calls. It seemed to her that being vice-president would make up for everything—for having Neva go to the Sisters' School in Wisconsin, and for Mary Monroe's getting the highest marks on her English papers.

There was a nudging and a whispering among the girls at the back of the room. One homely, timid maiden, with a faint high voice and an aged countenance, nominated Mary Monroe. A boy was pushed to his feet and nominated Winnie Johnson.

Marjorie's heart was beating heavily. She bent over and drew a long cigar to decorate Mr. Prosser's mouth.

Then Harry Ryan jumped to his feet and cried: "Mr. President, I want to nominate Margie Schoessel!"

Her heart thudded, and then began to beat evenly but quickly. She made flourishes of smoke coming out of Mr. Prosser's cigar, and then bent down to fasten her shoestring, pretending not to notice the nudgings of girls and their whispers of "Kid, kid—you're nominated!"

The girls pretended to be careless and laughing while the ballots were being counted, and while the tellers were placing chalk marks beside the three names on the blackboard. The sound of the names, read off in a singing careless tone from the bits of paper that Harry Ryan was opening importantly, filled Marjorie with a strange excitement. . . . "Marjorie Schoessel, Marjorie Schoessel, Mary Monroe, Marjorie, *Mar*—jorie . . ." When she saw that she was going to be elected, a sudden wonderful ease came over her and the moisture dried from the palms of her hands.

The soft transparent skin of Winnie's cheeks was flushed.

Only a few boys had voted for her. Everyone knew that she could not make the speech at the banquet. There was a brightness in her eyes, with their thick lids and long corners, and she still had her little secret smile. Mary Monroe looked stiff and hot. Perhaps she had really expected to be elected. She got the highest marks in the class; but was a plain scowling girl who wore "sensible shoes," had made a study of the birds, and was not allowed to stay later than ten at class parties. The boys would not vote for her.

When the election of officers was over, the boys could no longer stand the strain of the necessary earnestness. George Rooney proposed "lavender and old lace" for the class colours. There were hoarse, approving laughs from the boys, scornful looks from the girls. Fish Carter sat grinning, not knowing how to quell the uproar. The tellers solemnly wrote the proposed colours on the board, to the impatience of Harry Ryan; and if it had not been for the solid vote of the girls for "old rose and silver-grey," they might have won. The meeting ended in a tumult, with the dash down from the stairs to the cloakroom, cheers from the boys for the class, Fish Carter, the superintendent, and the janitor.

The S.S.'s went as far as Willis' corner together, but there Jessie and Mildred turned off. Kat and Marjorie walked on together, their arms tightly linked. Fish Carter had put Kat upon the first social committee. He wrote notes to her in the assembly room—perhaps he would "go with her" now that the older crowd was out of high school. The two girls could hardly bear to part. They stood talking in front of the Schoessel house, and then went as far as the corner and stood talking some more. Their cheeks were hot and their eyes bright with triumph; and the sharp air, the dry scent of bonfire smoke, excited them.

"Kid, didn't you honestly know you'd get elected?"

"No, honestly I didn't. Didn't you really think Jessie would get an office?"

"Um-um, I didn't. The boys don't like Jessie. Kid, I'll

tell you something if you want to know. Do you? Well, Mildred didn't vote for you."

A hot thrust of pain made Marjorie's face flush deeply.

"Well, she doesn't have to if she doesn't want to."

"Kid, I wouldn't care a bit. But I thought I'd tell you. . . . You come over to-night, can't you?"

"You come over to my house."

"Well, all right. If the folks'll let me."

2

The girls always served at "mamma's table" at the Congregational Church suppers. They liked these nights—the slightly chilly basement rooms with their smell of plaster; the long tables where jelly gleamed darkly in the glass dishes on white cloths laid over newspapers; the people coming in and out; the smell of coffee. They chose pieces of cake with thick frosting from the silver cake dishes before the supper began; wrapped the cake in a paper napkin and hid it among wraps out in the little cold primary room. They giggled about the people, with a joyous, light-hearted ruthlessness. Kat said that she was going to spill some coffee on Mr. Fitzpatrick's bald head. She tipped the coffee-pot daringly nearer and nearer. Mildred and Marjorie ran out into the entry and clung to each other, helpless with laughter. They took joy in thinking up names to call Mrs. Bradley, who had charge of the kitchen, and who bore down upon them, urging: "Girls, girls! I'm afraid you're neglecting your tables." When Mrs. Bradley said blandly: "I wonder who's willing to run to one of the stores and get me a little bit of soda," they were all innocently silent. They liked the bustle and clatter, the crisp white aprons of the women in charge. They pretended to snatch at food behind Mrs. Bradley's back in the kitchen. The waitresses always ate together. Marjorie knew that mamma would save some of the best food for them, in spite of Mrs. Bradley.

To-night, Ray Bender and Fish Carter came together to

the church supper. Their pompadours had been waxed and stood up stiffly. They wore white collars, instead of the dingy old sweaters in which they came to school. Hummer sat across the table from them.

"What are you boys sitting here for?" he demanded. "Seems to me I saw Mattie Schley try to get you at her table."

"That was you she was trying to get, Hummer."

"What are you fellows so slicked up for? Must be something doing to-night."

"Sure. There's a meeting of the W.C.T.U. Aren't you going, Hummer?"

But when the girls pushed behind their chairs, with dishes of fresh biscuits, the boys were embarrassed and did not look up from their plates. They pretended not to hear Hummer's teasing.

Kat stopped Marjorie in the kitchen and whispered—with her arm around Marjorie's waist: "Got something to tell you." Marjorie's eyes were bright with restless expectation as she squeezed her way about the crowded table, pouring coffee from a tall pitcher. Kat came up to her and whispered again: "Don't tell the girls you'll go to Mildred's. The boys want us to go somewhere with them."

When the supper was over, Marjorie and Kat slipped away, with a sense of joyous distinction and conspiracy, from the other girls. They put on their coats and fuzzy caps in the cold, unlighted primary room, where they could just see the organ and small red chairs. They had put away four big slices of chocolate cake, and, with many giggles, they concealed these in Marjorie's muff.

"Marge, they want us to go sleigh-riding. You don't have to ask your mother, do you?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Kid, tell her she's got to let you go."

Marjorie hurried into the warm, coffee-scented kitchen where her mother was sorting silver with other tired women in white aprons. It was easier to speak to mamma while

there were other people about, so that there would be less chance for questioning. She tried to make it seem casual and hasty.

"Mamma, some of us are going sleigh-riding for a little while. You don't care, do you?"

"Why, who's going?"

"Oh . . . a bunch of us. We won't be gone long. Hurry up, mamma. We have to go—honestly. Please."

Mrs. Fitzpatrick laughed archly, "Oh, you'll have to let her go."

"Well, now, Marjorie, if you'll promise——"

"Yes! yes! I will!"

She danced off, exultant. The best way was to act as if it were all settled and mamma had already said yes. This was the kind of thing—"girls going off by themselves with boys"—of which Mrs. Phillips did not approve. If mamma had known there were to be only four of them, she would not have let her go. It was like the older crowd. Perhaps Kat would go with Fish Carter and she would go with Ray Bender—they would be like the older couples, like Grace Patterson and Harvey Anderson. Now she would be really "going with the boys." . . . She and Jessie had come together. Jessie would be waiting for her, wondering where she had gone. But she knew that Jessie did not count beside this. A little shame gnawed at her eagerness.

The boys had put together some of the money that they had saved from doing odd jobs on Saturdays, and had hired a sleigh at the old livery barn. It was the kind of night that some of the older people at the church supper had been approving as "a sample of the real old Iowa winters." The snow was beaten down hard in the wide roads. The clock in the courthouse tower shone chilly and white. The boys tucked the coarse hairy robes over the girls' feet. The horses had no sleigh-bells, but their harness jangled faintly. Clouds of silvery vapour came from their big damp nostrils.

They drove where all the sleighing parties went—to By-

ron. The snowy fields were white and wan under the winter moon. Withered goldenrod pricked through the snow, etched with gaunt delicacy. The girls had a dreamy sense of the beauty of the white earth while they talked and "jollied." They felt happily metropolitan driving into Byron, where the scattered houses were already dark, and only one dim kerosene lamp shone from the back part of the store.

"Shall we stop and get something?" the boys asked.

"It's closed up, isn't it?"

"Aw, we'll make the old fellow get up if he's gone to bed."

The girls waited in the sleigh until the boys came out with a sack of old-fashioned chocolate drops and four packages of gum. Ray poured half the candy into Kat's hands, and then put the crumpled sack between him and Marjorie on the back seat. He tried with nonchalant, boyish awkwardness to reach into the sack when Marjorie did, caught her fingers and closed them around a chocolate drop.

"Hey, you be good back there!" Fish shouted.

They must be "cutting up," "having a good time," like Kat and Fish in the front seat. Ray's face—serious from the cold, his cap pulled down over his stiff pompadour—was strange to Marjorie. She could think of nothing to say to him when they got off the common ground of making fun of the principal and denouncing "old Prosser." Ray had driven to Byron, but it was also part of the code that the two couples change seats and Fish drive home. Marjorie tried to be easy and animated, not to let Ray know that this was the first time she had ever really been out with a boy, except for coming home from class parties with Harry Ryan. She did not count Chub Patterson. And that dreadful Christian Endeavor social from which she had let Ivanhoe Atwater take her home. The girls had all run off from her, giggling, and she had not known how to get away from Ivanhoe. He had tramped beside her without a word, she walking as fast as she could and trying to keep a little ahead of him—he making clumsy attempts to

take her arm at the crossings. She had tried to keep it from the boys, but of course Rich had found out. He had called her "Rowena" until she had blazed out in a passion of anger and shame, and papa had "spoken" to him. Now even Hummer dared not mention the name of Ivanhoe Atwater to her, and the girls did not put it among the seven slips in her envelope when she slept on wedding cake. . . . Marjorie edged over, clasped her hands tightly in her muff, and talked animatedly about the Latin test. She did not want Ray to put his arm around her, but she was too unaccustomed to know how to evade it. She had to pretend feverishly that she did not know it was there.

But when she was in bed, alone, she could remember how the sky and the fields had looked. She could see everything—the face of the clock up above the wintry trees, the way the snow was piled along the edges of the roads. She and Kat would have the sleigh-ride to talk about to-morrow. They would be envied by the other girls. She knew what "going with" Ray Bender meant—a basketball ticket, an invitation to the banquet, glory and eminence. He was almost as popular as Fish Carter.

She was awake a long time, curling up her feet in her night-dress to get them warm, and throwing her long braid across the chill smoothness of her white pillow.

3

Strange new values had come into the organization of "the bunch." Neva, because she was going to the Sisters' School, occupied a special social pinnacle. But the actual leadership was divided between Marjorie and Kat; and it was Kat now, who was going with Fish Carter, hero of the basketball team—Kat, with a season ticket for all the games, sure of an invitation to the banquet—who had a little the best of it. Every issue of *Ripples* was full of flattering jokes about "Kat and Fish."

Mildred had always been a little on the outskirts of the

crowd. But now she was ahead of Jessie. For some reason, the boys did not ask Jessie—except one shy, lumbering country boy who wanted to take her to the high-school debates. Jessie seemed to draw the unfortunates. She sat next to Louie Bassett in History class, and spent her time whispering to him and exchanging cartoons of the teachers.

What was it about Jessie? She was lively, witty, often full of wild spirits. But her made-over clothes had a kind of dinginess. Her little hands were rough and chapped, often chilly. She had to work hard at home, and often could not be with the other girls. She did not know how to comb her thin, pretty, curly black hair. Her face was just the least bit pinched. In spite of her laughing greenish-grey eyes and her curved lips, her comical little nose with the freckles, she was not quite pretty. Kat, with her fresh-skinned commonplace face, was more admired by the high-school boys. Jessie had family troubles that she laughed off with a bright frankness. She would "pick up with" the queerest girls in school, and she had an odd-looking lot of cousins from the country who always trailed her about on holidays. She "did not think about the crowd," Neva said.

Winnie had dropped out of the crowd entirely. The mothers disapproved of her. She had been "going with the boys" since she was eleven. In the eighth grade, she had had a wild popularity. Then even Rich, who pretended to scorn all of Marjorie's playmates, had liked Winnie. But she had had her time too early. She was "easy," the boys began to say. Now she went only with boys like George Rooney. They ran about the streets at night, and had once been caught pulling up Mrs. Phillips' choicest tulips. Winnie and George Rooney had been seen "down by the power house."

After the sleigh-ride, Kat and Fish and Marjorie and Ray went to the class parties and debates together. Kat and Marjorie became allies. They had secrets together, wrote notes to each other in assembly, and went off after school without waiting for the other girls. When one saw the

other, she cried at once: "Kid, I've got something to tell you!" Now, Kat and Fish, Marjorie and Ray, were the leading high-school couples, like the Grace Patterson and Harvey Anderson, the Avis Wilcox and Deek Davis, whom they had worshipped with awe in their Freshman days. They were on the pinnacle of high-school glory.

But it was not as she had always thought that it must be. In spite of the exaltation of being the chosen of one of the basketball team, the rich food for her pride in the flattering mention in *Ripples,* in the adoration of younger girls who copied her clothes and the way she did her hair . . . Marjorie was uneasy and on a strain.

It was fun to use Ray's season ticket at the basketball games, to feel the swelling pride of ownership when the boys shouted: "Go it, Bendy—*good* old Bendy!" and the girls shrieked and waved their pennants. But she did not like his rather pathetic unfledged thinness in his little sleeveless jersey and trunks. Ray Bender came from Leland. He was staying with his uncle and going to the Buena Vista High School.

When they were with Kat and Fish, making candy in the Wilcox kitchen or pounding the piano, it was all right. But at other times they had nothing to say to each other. They went out into the kitchen to make fudge, and were relieved to have Bud come trailing after them, drawn irresistibly by the smell of candy.

"Gee!" Bud said, his eyes shining. "I sure thought that great big guy from Bronson was going to get that basket. Gosh, you sure did get that ball away from him. Old Fish, he did pretty good too, that night."

It was good to have her brothers approve of her, to feel the subtle undercurrent of praise in Hummer's teasing when she went into the store. But there was something always lacking. She and Ray were never going to be like Jo and Laurie, or like the Little Colonel and Rob. Ray's hands were always a little grimy at the finger-tips. She tried fastidiously not to look at them. The other girls

whispered that Ray Bender was "soft." When they were together, he was constantly making little experiments, and Marjorie was constantly edging away. She remembered her old dreams of an "artist"—or perhaps a millionaire's son who wore yachting costume and knew all the superior glories of society. Always, beneath her tense preoccupation with the harsh, wounding, absorbing present, were the old dreams—dim, and yet stirring—of going away to Europe, studying music in that great room with the polished floor, finding something that she must have; and she held herself a little apart.

There were advantages and disadvantages both in being "the nice girls." The boys asked them to parties, to everything that counted. But on soft spring nights, when mist was in the air, it would be fun to run about the dusky streets, pulling up tulips, climbing the long narrow stairs in the dark to ring the high-school bell. The things that the other girls did.

The girls were not allowed to go to town dances or to the roller-skating rink. These places did not have a good reputation. But in spite of maternal commands, they went to the skating rink after school—"just to look on."

The floor was dusty and uneven in places. There was a constant, deafening rumble of skates. The girls sat down on the row of kitchen chairs along the wall, uneasily drawing back their feet when any of the skaters came too close. They did not know just what evil hung about the rink, but they felt its fascination. It gave a perilous lure to the skating. Buena Vista's Bohemia congregated on the floor of the rink. Eva Leland came every afternoon; and they looked at her enviously as she skated alone, making great swoops in and out, crossing her feet easily. She was one of the few girls whom the proprietor, a thin man who kept on his derby hat, considered expert enough to skate with him. Mrs. Slater, the town divorcee, was there, skating with a little fat man who scarcely came to her shoulder. The boy who fastened and unfastened skates darted in and out

through the stream of couples and solitary skaters, a calm uplifted look on his face. He did not cross his feet at the turns, but lifted one leg high and skated slowly and skilfully on one foot.

All at once, the girls began to look conscious and to nudge one another. Ray Bender had come with Midge Fisher, and was putting on her skates. They began to skate slowly around the room together, their arms closely entwined. Ray bent to Midge with a drowsy look on his face, his eyes half closed. Then he saw the girls and turned red.

Kat clutched Marjorie's arm. She whispered excitedly: "Kid, what are you going to do? Are you going to turn him down?"

Marjorie ached with chagrin, with the knowledge that all the girls had seen—even Mildred. Midge Fisher, whom Rich called contemptuously "an old battle-ax," who was one of those girls who went down to the ravine near the power house. . . . She tried to laugh it off scornfully as she left the rink, not to let the girls see in her eyes the hurt pride that made her eyelids burn and her throat ache.

She would avenge her pride. The code demanded it. The girls were all waiting. Kat begged: "Don't turn him down yet. Wait until he explains, and see what he says." But when she met Ray in the corridor the next day, she passed him without speaking. When he asked her to go to the class party, she would "turn him down."

Fish had already asked Kat. But Ray did not "try to explain." She sat expecting a note to be passed down the aisle to her in the assembly room; looked forward to going to her English class so that Ray could speak to her in the hall. There was a whisper around her—"What's the matter, have Ray and Marjorie quit?" She made Kat stop at the end of the hall and said feverishly: "Just see how grand it looks outdoors! Look at that tree!" The boys lounged on past them into the classroom, Fish stopping a moment to grin and call back: "You girls are gona have a tardy mark after your names!" Marjorie could not comprehend a word

of the lesson, could hardly bear the exertion of tearing her mind from its tense, sickening preoccupation when she had to write a paragraph on the board to show the uses of the colon and semicolon. After school, she and Kat went to the store. She thought up reasons for not getting away from the big front window, where they would be visible if the boys went past.

Only drays passed, and a wagon from the country. At home, the telephone did not ring.

She had to act airy and unconcerned so that the girls would not suspect. It should have been "she who quit him," not "he who quit her." Even Mildred had someone to take her to the party. If only she could get a cold, or go to visit Aunt Bessie, so that she would not have to go alone with Jessie! Harry Ryan had already asked that new girl. Guy Wiggins would try to walk home with her—she would rather have no one than Guy Wiggins. Mildred had gone home with Guy Wiggins from the first class party. She had said afterwards: "Honestly, girls, I couldn't help it." But they knew it was because she had taken the only boy she could get, and they despised her for it.

When the family began to ask curiously: "What's become of Ray?" Marjorie tossed her head with a pretence of airy impatience. "I don't know." But her pride was soothed when she heard her mother say: "Well, papa, Marjorie seems to have given her young man his walking-papers."

She would no longer have to whip herself up to be lively and entertaining with Ray, to walk fast so that he would not have a chance to put his arm around her. She would not have to edge away from the touch of his grimy hands.

But there would be no longer the old feeling of proud security when Hummer teased her; the other girls asking with respect: "Are you coming home with us or with somebody else?"; the secrets and exciting talks with Kat. She felt with stinging humiliation that part of her eminence in the high school was gone; and she must get it back somehow.

She might try to go with Harold Jefferson. He was the only other boy in the class who was as popular as Ray and Fish. He had told Chub Patterson that she was "a swell girl." But she did not like him. She could never forget what he had done to Buster.

She was never again going with a boy whom she did not like. When Harry Ryan wrote a note asking "if it was really all off between her and R. B.," she did not answer it. She would be "prominent"—throw herself ardently into other things.

4

Mr. Prosser always chose for editor-in-chief of *Ripples* one of the popular boys who would "please people." The bright girls, who were willing to slave away after school hours, and the boys with literary aspirations—like Louie Bassett—composed the staff. Louie Bassett was the staff artist. The magazine appeared every month in a green paper cover with a pen-and-ink drawing by Louie Bassett: a "college girl," copied from the college annuals, with skirts frothing about her slippers, a fuzzy tam pinned tightly to the back of her head, and a little cane with a pennant on which was printed "B.V.H.S." Marjorie was the editor of the society and exchange columns, and Jessie of the joke department.

Jessie, Marjorie, and Louie Bassett were the only ones who really cared about the magazine. They were always present at the weekly meetings around the long table in the superintendent's office. They liked the important feeling of reading and passing upon the ambitious sketches by Freshmen that they found in the box (upperclassmen were a little ashamed of "handing things in to *Ripples*").

Although Marjorie and Jessie still joked about Louie Bassett in public, they kept as a kind of secret between them that they talked as equals with him in these staff meetings. Louie drew for each of them a water-colour copy of a Har-

rison Fisher girl. After the meetings, he walked with them as far as Willis' corner—although at first he had self-consciously pretended to be kept at the schoolhouse until the girls were safely down the walk.

Jessie said bravely: "Well, I don't care, I like Louie Bassett. He isn't as big a pill as some people they don't call pills."

"Oh, yes, but then you wouldn't *go* with Louie Bassett."

"I don't know that he's so much more of a pill than I seem to be," Jessie answered hardily.

But her lips quivered, and there was something forlorn about the tilt of her head and set of her thin little shoulders. No one but that boy from the country had ever asked her to go anywhere. It was better to have gone with Ray Bender, in spite of not liking him. The girls, and the boys too, would always think more of Marjorie because of it.

Sometimes after school the girls went off quickly and left Jessie. Once they had written a note to her, pretending that it had come from Harvey Anderson, the most popular boy in the Senior class. Jessie might have had sense enough to know that he wouldn't write to her—it was that something innocent and credulous about Jessie that led them on. But she had believed it. She wrote a scrawly little note in return, saying that she had to go home and iron, but that she "would like to sometime, though." The girls were elated over the success of their hoax at first. But afterwards, Marjorie could not bear to look at Jessie's little unconscious, exultant face in the assembly room. She felt as Rich and Chub Patterson had felt when they had read Louie Bassett's diary to everyone, with the part telling how he was "madly in love" with Genevieve Cousins; and then heard that Louie Bassett had threatened to kill himself.

Jessie "liked" Louie Bassett now. She could not hide it, as the other girls did. There was a little, childish transparency about Jessie. . . . But Jessie understood things better than any of the other girls. Now it was Jessie whom Marjorie wanted again. . . . But there was a hurt, in-

genuous look in Jessie's eyes when Marjorie confided to her in the cloakroom: "Kid, you'll never guess! Louie Bassett asked me to go to the debate on Friday night!"

Jessie asked slowly: "Are you going?"

"I should say not."

But she had not really been scornful when Louie Bassett had asked her, turning very pink and looking away. She had not known what to say to him. But she could not face the scorn of her brothers, the tittering of the girls, if she went with him.

She felt very gay and lively all that afternoon, as if she could do what she pleased. She cut up in assembly, and her name was read out on the four o'clock list with those of George Rooney, Fish Carter and Albert Warren. George Rooney, in spite of his "tough reputation," held an admired position in the high school. His name was oftener upon the four o'clock list than that of any other pupil.

But when Marjorie saw Louie Bassett going home alone after school, she felt a strange, gnawing sense of betrayal. Her liveliness was gone. She went up to her own room and sat on the bed, gloomily, torn by pride and conflicting desires, and sunk in a confused degradation. She wanted to free herself from something—she scarcely knew what; and she looked over at her books on the white shelves as if they might do it for her. She ran downstairs to the piano and dug out her old book of exercises, trying to get back the feeling that she had had when she was taking lessons from Miss Davison.

But something held her back from the absorption that she craved. Now those days when she had played in Miss Davison's green-walled music room, with the grapes outside the window, seemed cool and beautiful . . . but so remote that she could never find them again.

Chapter III

I

THE whole Schoessel household centred about Marjorie now. She was excused from dish-washing and dusting so that she could keep her hands in condition for the contest. Bud was sent off to see one of his cronies in the evening, so that there would be no noise while she practised; and her father and mother meekly trotted off to call on the Fitzpatricks when she said that she wanted the place to herself.

She was a marked figure in the high school. She had won the home declamatory contest, and was going with Miss Cuddiford to the district contest in Forest Bluffs. When Miss Cuddiford had a vacant period, she was summoned from the assembly room to practise; and all their eyes followed her as she went with a proud, glowing self-consciousness down the aisle. After school, she went to Miss Cuddiford's room, and the girls ran off without her to look at the silks in Patterson's window or to make candy at Mildred's. She did not miss these things. Every moment was too packed with tense excitement.

The most wonderful thing was the new intimacy with Miss Cuddiford, whom the girls were "worshipping," as they had once worshipped Miss Battles. The whole English room, with the rows of chairs pushed askew from the hurried exit of the last class, was deified by the signs of Miss Cuddiford—the little crumpled handkerchief on her desk, the shining black lynx fur half slipping from the back of a chair. Her little fur cap and winter coat hanging beside the door had a kind of fragrance. Marjorie had

fastened a snap-shot in the rim of her mirror—Miss Cuddiford on a snowy day, in her black lynx furs and little fur cap, smiling into the sunshine; and she took down all the invitations to parties and snap-shots of the girls and of Bud and Buster, and left Miss Cuddiford's there alone.

The after-school hours in the English room were a mingled pain, fear and intoxicating joy. There was almost a hurt in the necessary closeness that she felt now with her beloved Miss Cuddiford. She dimly sensed that it had been different with Miss Davison—less personal. She was afraid of the revealment that the practice brought—of "being dramatic," of "showing her feelings"—and yet she longed for it, too. She took suggestions, criticisms, with downcast eyes and trembling, pained lips; praise with shy exultation that was almost harder to control.

"I want this to mean something to you, Marjorie," Miss Cuddiford said with her bright-eyed, fervent earnestness. "I want you to have a piece that you will get something out of, so that I can feel that you're *growing*. I know you're capable of the very best—aren't you, Marjorie?"

Marjorie looked down, flushed and shy, proud of Miss Cuddiford's confidence but distressed to think of the piece that she had given in the home contest. It was one that Aunt Bessie had sent her, after she had spent despairing hours looking through the old *Speaker,* with its photographs of a man in evening dress and a short blonde woman in Grecian costume posturing and grimacing to portray "Grief," "Prayer," "Jealousy," "Coquetry." A girl in Shell Rock had won a contest with it, and she had known that it would "take." Mrs. Phillips and Miss Ida Willis, two of the judges, had given her first place; although the Methodist minister had given first to Guy Wiggins in the Oratorical Department. Jessie and Mildred had both entered the humorous department. Jessie had given *Little Orphant Annie;* and there had been a tone in Jessie's voice, a kind of vibrating loneliness, that had stirred Marjorie and given her an admiring uneasiness. But Jessie was forlorn up

there on the rostrum. It was as if she were alone in her feeling, and were speaking to herself. Mildred's monologue—*Sister Samanthy Snow at the Sewing-Circle*—had won; and Jessie had been given the lowest place on the program.

But this "piece" was harder. It was Miss Cuddiford's own cutting from *If I Were King,* the one she had used in the Public Speaking department in college. Marjorie was afraid of the love scenes. She tried with painstaking earnestness to imitate Miss Cuddiford's deep swaggering tones when she spoke for Villon, although somehow it made her a little ashamed; and she watched with quivering emulation the softly flowering gesture of Miss Cuddiford's round arm and tiny, opening hand. "The gesture must flow down, flow down from the shoulders, and just simply . . . open out . . . blossom . . . in the hand. . . ." But the gestures of her thin little arms were so stiff and unfledged beside those of Miss Cuddiford. She spoke in a stilted, girlish voice for Villon.

It was only when she was alone in her room at night, with the doors closed and the assurance that the boys would not be at home before nine, that she dared try these things for herself. Although her mother said reproachfully: "You surely don't mind papa and mamma!" she could practise best on lodge nights, when they were all out of the house. She could dare the terrifying sound of her own voice.

She waited until the sound of steps on the cement walk was faint. Then she ran into her mother's room, and practised her gestures before the long mirror there. There was a deep new excitement in "letting herself go"—a quivering shame about it, too, so that she stopped short if she heard the faintest sound. There was not that austere pleasure which she had glimpsed years ago in her music. But this gave glimpses of a satisfaction, too . . . something that was even beyond her craving to win the contest. A new possession of herself, a loosening of the tight youthful bonds of self-consciousness and timidity and inexperience.

She was alone in the house. No one could hear her.

There were no neighbours on her own side of the house, and only the Putzes on the other. Even Buster was outside somewhere.

She sat down on the glossy cedar chest which papa and mamma had given her for Christmas. She leaned against the foot of her iron bed and closed her eyes, feeling the beat of her heart and her own faint mysterious warmth, in the pulsating silence. Miss Cuddiford had told her to "get control" before she began. The first words said themselves over in her mind—"François Villon, thief, gambler, rogue and poet . . ." She stood up before her mirror, beginning in a queer hushed voice: "François Villon—*Frawnswa Veeyon . . .*"

Her new dress! She had refused to let her mother get Minnie Clapsaddle to make her dress. Minnie Clapsaddle never got the neck right, and she always had puckers at the waist. Mrs. Phillips had said that they must get a dressmaker in Wahseta—a "Madame"—and Marjorie and her mother had stayed over Saturday with Aunt Clara while the measurements were being taken.

She hurried into her mother's room to get the dress from the chiffonier where it had been laid away in tissue paper. Underneath it was the dearest thing of all—the little white brocaded corset that she had wanted so terribly that mamma could not refuse. Something ineffable went through her as she touched the rough, catchy satin with the boning under it. But that was too sacred to be worn before the contest. She took off her red serge dress and her sateen petticoat with swift, quivering fingers—took the dress out of the rustling tissue paper and slipped it over her head, feeling the crackle of the new ribbons and the delicate rasp of the net through the soft silk slip. Impatiently she tucked in her despised winter underwear at the neck. The dress floated, crisp and shimmering, and then softly settled. Mrs. Phillips was going to buy white slippers and stockings for her at Marshall Field's.

She stepped back, back to the door, imagining the big

church platform and the audience in Forest Bluffs. In her new dress, she could dare even to try the love scenes. Tonight, in the men's speeches, her voice came out with a deep new vibration that enraptured her. It seemed to her that her arms were magically graceful in the puffed net sleeves. She leaned close to the mirror, and looked into the mysterious dark shine of her eyes under the soft brown hair that she pulled forward to make a pompadour. She could hear the swish of her ribbon girdle when she moved.

"The folks" were coming home from lodge. She hastily took off the net dress, refolded it in the rustling tissue paper, scuttled into the other room with it, and laid the soft, yielding bundle back in the chiffonier drawer, in the darkness.

2

Forest Bluffs was a rambling, old-fashioned town on the Wapsie River. Main Street, which ended in a steep woody hill, was hung with "Welcome" banners. The whole town was elated over having "got the contest."

Marjorie and Miss Cuddiford were taken to the home of Captain and Mrs. English—a pleasant, brown-painted frame house with a little iron fence around the chimney. They had a large room with an alcove and heavy walnut furniture. Old Mrs. English brought them hot water—the house had no bathroom—and inquired anxiously about bedding. She insisted on their having "a little lunch," which turned out to be fresh biscuits, jelly, preserves, coco-nut cake and coffee, served at one end of the long, old-fashioned dining-room table. When Miss Cuddiford was afraid to let Marjorie drink the coffee, Mrs. English brought her fresh milk in a tall goblet with a little circle of faded, painted flowers. Captain English brought back a sack of candy from town. He said anxiously:

"I hope our little girl wins."

"But you don't want Forest Bluffs to get beat, pa, do you?" Mrs. English demanded.

"Well, I s'pose we ought all to be patriotic, but I'd kind o' like to see our little girl beat the bunch."

"She ought to go up and lie down a spell," Mrs. English said anxiously. "She'll be all tired out before the thing begins."

She lay down on the great walnut bed, and Mrs. English covered her with a big soft quilt with a pattern of faded, brownish leaves. Captain English lighted the little stove in the alcove. Marjorie could not sleep. But she was cosy, lying there under the warm quilt, with the old-fashioned blinds at the windows, and wood crackling in the little stove. She could hear the movements of the others downstairs, hear Mrs. English come creaking carefully up the stairway, holding the rail; and she felt, in spite of her consciousness of the ordeal ahead of her, deliciously tended and protected.

The events of the great day came relentlessly, one after the other. Miss Cuddiford heard her say her piece once more. There was a thrilling intimacy about this last practice.

"Oh, Marjorie, I'm so pleased with the way you've worked on this!" Miss Cuddiford breathed fervently. "That counts so much more than winning the contest. Now, I know I'm going to be proud of you whether you win or not."

Marjorie searched tremulously for her hairpins at the dresser, bending her head to hide sensitive tears. She would never be able to speak well enough to show her adoration of Miss Cuddiford.

They had supper with the other contestants and their protectors in the chilly basement room of the Methodist church. The Methodist ladies served. Some of the contestants had already struck up acquaintanceship, but others sat silent, scarcely raising their eyes to mumble thanks when they were served with trays of potato salad, fruit gelatine, sandwiches and cake and coffee.

A boy with curly hair and a flushed face, who came from Freedom, sat down beside Marjorie and Miss Cuddiford.

He was the only boy in the dramatic department. There were two other girls, one from Dickerson, and one—a thin blonde who wore an overtrimmed, home-made dress—from the little "burg" of Shiloh. The boy talked in a steady, excited stream. Everyone was saying that the girl from Dickerson "had the contest."

"Oh, she's got it. The rest of us might as well quit," the boy declared. "She's been taking lessons on her piece all year, and she's got two of the judges right now."

Marjorie listened with a sinking fear, in spite of the encouragement of Miss Cuddiford. But there was a consolation in the excitable championship of the boy from Freedom. They were united against the Dickerson girl.

This girl was very much in the centre of things at the reception. Fifty members of the Dickerson High School were to come in on the evening train. She was laughing and briskly flirting with all the other boys in the contest except her solitary male competitor in the dramatic department. She looked terrifyingly mature, with long skirts and hair curled tightly on the iron and fastened in a grown-up coil. Her manner, her brisk strong voice, the self-assured glances of her prominent round eyes, expressed unassailable confidence.

"She knows she's got the contest," people were whispering.

Because of her certainty, she could afford to jest about her chances, laughing loudly with a tall, shock-haired boy in the oratorical department.

"Zero'll be about my marking—or minus!" she cried animatedly.

"It's likely to be!" he jeered. "That's what I'd think from all these tales about you I've been hearing."

"What tales have you been hearing?" she asked eagerly.

"Fishing! Fishing!"

"You know I'm not any such thing! All right, then, you don't have to tell me. I can guess about what they are, alas, I fear!"

"Oh, yes—'alas, I fear'! You believe that, don't you? Wait until you see *me* after the contest—if there's anything to see. Expect there may be a few pieces to take home to mother."

"Yes, they believe a lot of that!" the boy from Freedom whispered bitterly. And he added feverishly, when they parted: "Meet you at the big doings. Don't give up the ship. Show her a fight."

Marjorie went back to the English house in a daze of tense excitement. But all the time that Miss Cuddiford was helping her to dress in her white net and white slippers, she knew that there was despair under everything. It was the thought of the Dickerson girl with her round prominent eyes glancing with a bright certainty about the basement room at the church, the assured swing of her shoulders when she walked. That girl had the contest.

"Well, look at our little girl, pa!" Mrs. English exclaimed. "All in white, even her slippers! Now, dearie, you mustn't get those pretty slippers dirty going over those awful crossings. We'll just wrap your little feet up in tissue paper and then you can wear a pair of my old rubbers."

"Well, sir, now," old Captain English said, "I see I'll have to go back on Forest Bluffs after all!"

The Englishes were going early so that they would be sure to get seats. People were going almost from the supper table. It was rumoured that the Methodist church would not hold the crowd, and that there would have to be an overflow meeting. The springlike darkness seemed to be filled with hurrying, chattering groups. They turned to look at Marjorie.

"There goes one of 'em!" they whispered.

The auditorium in the Methodist church was already filled. The contestants had to wait in the little vestry room. There was an atmosphere of tingling, suppressed nervousness. That big boy in the oratorical department was "cutting up" and trying to brazen it out. He unrolled the pictured Sunday School charts on the wall and made facetious remarks

about the Golden Texts—moving away hastily when the Forest Bluffs superintendent came to the door. He cried in an absurd falsetto: "Oh, deah, how can I bear it!" and pretended to shiver violently. One girl was seated in a corner, her eyes half closed, trying to "go over her piece." The girl from Dickerson seemed to be perfectly, almost impudently assured.

"Tell me if my skirts hang right!" she demanded blithely.

"Just a minute, just a minute," the tall boy put in eagerly.

She swung about on her heel, making a face at him. "I wasn't asking you!"

She was aware that some of the others were whispering: "It isn't fair—nobody's allowed to wear costume!" But she gave her head a little toss, laughed and talked hardily; and her strong even teeth flashed. She was to give the "arena scene" from *Quo Vadis?* She wore her hair in a Grecian knot with a classic bandeau, and the sleeves of her white dress were long and flowing. Before her mature assurance and flashing smile, Marjorie felt like a little girl in her net dress and white hair-ribbon.

But there was a consolation in having the boy from Freedom single her out conspicuously. He gallantly spread his handkerchief for her on the vestry steps with their thin, dusty carpeting of red ingrain.

"We've got to do our best now, little girl," he whispered feverishly. "We're going to give her a tussle."

They sat together and whispered through the oratorical speeches, listening with a wary pricking of ears to the applause. The tall boy with black hair, after all his hilarity and antics, got stage-fright and had to be prompted twice. When he came back to the vestry room, he gave a deep groan and pretended to stagger; but after that he sat alone in a corner, with his knees hunched up, and a sullen look in his eyes.

The moment was coming nearer and nearer. It was as if everything tightened, and with it that dreadful despair. The girl from Dickerson was the first to appear in the dra-

matic department. Her coach, a thin woman with frizzled hair and prominent teeth, came into the vestry to arrange the filmy scarf draped in classic style across her shoulders. The girl gave a last bright, hardy smile and walked easily to the platform.

The others sat listening tensely to the silences, the murmurs, the final burst of applause and the cheers from the Dickerson contingent. What was the pretty drama of *If I Were King* beside the terrors of the arena scene? The girl's voice was high, bright, assured. Before she spoke for the Romans, she gave a slight clearing of the throat and then boomed out in a gruff female barytone. Her delivery was finished, swift, unpausing except where the scene changed and she stopped dramatically before making a careful step forward.

She came back into the vestry room flushed and exultant, smoothing her hair, wrapping herself in the coat that her coach threw quickly around her shoulders, her eyes bright with awareness of the applause that still sounded from the audience room.

"Didn't I tell you?" the boy from Freedom whispered eagerly. "She's got it right now. We might as well stay off the platform. I tell you, it don't pay to give high-class selections, like you and I. It's this stuff that takes. Well—good luck, anyway, little girl. We'll mingle our tears."

Marjorie was nervously conscious of murmuring and shuffling from the audience as she went up the two, shallow, uncarpeted steps to the platform. She was alone, perilously alone, and all these unknown faces were looking up at her. A frozen tightness held her. A voice outside herself was repeating familiar words of her piece with a thin, hard brightness. It was over . . . she was leaving the platform, going back to the vestry room. . . .

"Great!" the boy from Freedom assured her with feverish, determined championship. It was his turn now. His eyes were glassily bright, and his lips were moving, repeating his opening lines. He begged: "Wish me luck, little girl";

and gave her hand a tense, perspiring grip. "I'm going to stand by the ship, anyway."

Marjorie could not listen to him. She could not bear to see Miss Cuddiford. She thought with a kind of sickness how her family, Orpha, Hummer, the school—everyone—expected her to win. She had failed them. She hated her white net dress. But it was over now. Nothing could ever matter again.

The contestants were driven, two by two, in a rocking old carriage, to the overflow meeting in the Baptist church. Marjorie and the boy from Freedom rode together. He took her hand and squeezed it nervously. Now that it was over, that the very worst had happened, she felt a reckless delight in the rocking of the carriage, the splashing of mud and smell of the damp road, the boy's hot hand holding hers.

"She hadn't any right to dress for the part that way, and use that scarf. It won't be fair if the judges give it to her. Gee, I'd like to see you get it!"

"Oh, but I won't. I know I won't."

"Oh, well! What do we care? Life is long. Isn't that right?" he demanded, squeezing her fingers. "Anyway, I'll never forget you and this night, little girl. If we're condemned, we'll be condemned together."

He pulled her over to him—she struggled, turned away her head, felt a moist pressure of lips on her cheek. They both sat back in the dark carriage, breathless. They went up the walk to the Baptist church, silent but intensely conscious of each other, through the darkness that smelled of spring.

The Baptist church was small—one narrow room with painted pews, heated by a stove with a red glare through the rusty iron. The audience sat, solemn-eyed and mournful, knowing that they were getting the "tail-end." The Dickerson girl was speaking. She hurried through her piece with a swift, expert carelessness that had in it a touch of superciliousness. The judges were at the other church. The clapping was perfunctory.

A sudden warm recklessness came over Marjorie; a hot

rush of desire to go through her piece again, redeem herself. All at once those queer, tight, frozen bonds had broken. She could still smell the dampness of the night, hear the splashing and pounding of the horses' hoofs. That hard, breathless kiss burned on her cheek. She felt the first words of her piece quivering to be said. She walked out on the platform in a wonderful flowing ease. She could make the room listen. When she came to the climactic line—*If I Were King*—she felt the rich thrill of her own voice, and the opening of her hand in Miss Cuddiford's flowering gesture. The applause was loud and spontaneous, for the first time in the overflow meeting. Marjorie left the platform in a glow of exaltation.

"I salute you," the boy from Freedom whispered solemnly.

She sat tingling with the consciousness of her triumph, while he went through his own performance with more vehemence than discretion. She did not want to let herself comprehend the dreadfulness of his voice when he spoke in a sickening falsetto for the women, and the forced melodrama of his climax. How could he! She looked down in agony, so that she would not have to see how funny he looked with his fierce red face and springy little figure. He would expect her to tell him how well he had done.

Then she lost track of his words, and sat in a shining, happy inattentiveness. Even when they went back to the Methodist church for the decision of the judges, a kind of jubilance and happy breathlessness persisted under her nervousness. The words she had spoken were singing themselves gloriously in her mind.

The contestants were herded into the little vestry room again to wait for the decision of the judges to be announced. They tried to carry off their flushed anxiety with nervous antics. One boy put on the Dickerson girl's scarf and struck ridiculous poses. A little round-faced girl was smiling happily because everyone was saying that she had won in the Humorous Department, with Riley's *Who's Afraid?* They all tried feverishly to reassure one another—"Oh, you've got

it—you've got it, all right!" "Yes, got the booby prize! *You're* the one that's got it." The boy from Freedom kept assuring Marjorie that she "had second, anyway." Now that he felt that the first place was decided, the order of the others became of momentous importance to him. The tall boy with the black hair would not talk. He said that he had a headache. The Dickerson girl was still assured, but now she sat apart, drawing her coat about her neck and shivering remotely.

They listened tensely. The decision of the judges was given by the Forest Bluffs superintendent, following a long and portentous silence. . . . That little light-haired boy whom no one had looked at, had first in the oratorical. . . . The Dickerson girl had won in the dramatic department.

It was all a kind of confusion. No one could believe that it was really over. Those who had won firsts relaxed into a buoyant relief, the others congratulated wildly, covering their defeat with humorous depreciations of themselves. Miss Cuddiford came into the vestry. She embraced Marjorie fervently, ignoring her defeat.

"You did beautifully—just beautifully!" she kept whispering.

Old Mrs. English and the Captain were waiting for them in the dining-room.

"Yes, now we all need something after what we've gone through," Mrs. English insisted. "It won't take me but a bit to get it. Sit down—pa, you see that they sit down."

"Well, sir," Captain English said, "I'm pretty proud of our little white bird if she didn't get first place! The other one had a little more thunder, that's all. You know it's thunder that makes the big noise. Yep!"

Mrs. English, coming in with cake, cried indignantly: "Why, that girl looked to me a whole lot too old to be in the high school. They oughtn't to let such as that take part."

"Well, I know who was the finest little girl in the whole shebang, anyway!" Captain English declared.

But they could see that Marjorie's lips were ready to tremble. Mrs. English looked warningly and commiseratingly at Miss Cuddiford.

"You folks don't need to wait for me and pa. You go right upstairs if you want to." And following them out into the chilly hallway, and putting her arms around Marjorie, she murmured: "Don't you go to feeling bad now, and thinking you didn't do just all right. Why, that girl that got the prize was a regular grown woman! You done just fine, and your mother'd been proud to hear you."

But all these things could only faintly soothe the soreness of her heart. She had lost. The overflow meeting did not count. Miss Cuddiford had not been there to hear her. Marjorie took off her white dress and slippers and packed them away in her father's big suitcase. When Miss Cuddiford came up to her and put a warm, soft arm around her, her eyes misted over with quick tears and she turned her head aside.

"It doesn't matter if you didn't win, Marjorie," Miss Cuddiford whispered. "Just think what you got out of it—you don't know how you've improved since I first heard you. And you're going to do better and better—I know it. Don't feel badly—will you?"

"No," said Marjorie, with a sobbing hiccup.

She lay in bed, between Mrs. English's soft blankets, wide-awake for a long time, tensely alert and yet confused by the images, thoughts that stayed with her. . . . Now that she was alone, that she did not have to hear their consolation, she could feel again a dazzle of happiness through the strange, confused memory of the long evening. The blanket against which her cheek was snuggled seemed aware of the burning of that kiss. That moment in the dark carriage, with the smell of damp earth outside, the hot pressure of the boy's hand, was a time apart from all other time. It had nothing to do with that dreadful performance of the boy from Freedom, in the overflow meeting. She could keep it, a strange, disturbing secret . . . perhaps whisper it to Kat

some night, if Kat would promise never to tell, when Kat was staying all night with her . . . or to Jessie. . . . She felt again the glory of the overflow meeting . . . and she seemed to fall asleep to the rocking of the carriage going through the darkness. . . .

3

It was dreadful, for a moment, to get off the train at home, to have mamma and papa meet her with such bright, reassuring smiles, such a pretence of happiness in her success; and then to go back to school . . .

But the very next day, Mr. Prosser read, solemnly and impressively, in assembly, a letter that had "just come to his hand" from the leading intellectual of Forest Bluffs, an elderly lawyer who had been present at the overflow meeting.

"I consider the young lady who represented your school and city to have given a rendition of a worthy piece of literature in a manner that might have put many an experienced lyceum performer to the blush. I have unfortunately mislaid my program of that evening and cannot recall this young lady's name, but I desire to extend to her, to yourself, and the body of the scholars by her represented my sincere congratulations.

"I remain, respectfully yours,
GEORGE WASHINGTON COFFIN."

The school cheered loudly.

And there were exciting rumours from Forest Bluffs. It was said now that the girl from Dickerson had "made use of properties." People thought that the judges should have attended the overflow meeting. Editorials appeared in the Dickerson paper and the Buena Vista *Banner*. It was said that the judges were unfair, that Marjorie Schoessel "ought to have had the contest."

Two letters and four post cards came from the boy in Freedom, to the respectful excitement of the other girls. An Easter card, addressed in a fine tremulous hand, came from old Mrs. English. It was the secret of that ride in the swaying carriage, that kiss in the darkness—and then the

overflow meeting with its different secret—that kept up her pride before the girls. In spite of having lost, the time at Forest Bluffs was beautiful in her mind, strangely complete.

All through the rest of the school year, and the following summer, Marjorie was asked to "give her piece"—at the musicale given by Mrs. Phillips for her niece; at special programs of the Eastern Star, the Rebeccahs and Yeomen; at the Christian Endeavor parties; and even at a large church supper in Byron.

Every night now, she waited in the English room for Miss Cuddiford and let the girls go on without her. None of the other girls knew that Miss Cuddiford was going to be married in the summer. But sometimes, walking home through the pearly spring twilight, past lawns where men just home from town were digging at their flower-beds, Miss Cuddiford gave her delicious confidences.

Going up her own familiar walk, seeing the blunt, reddish peony fronds poking up from the moist spring earth, smelling the leaves and the new grass, watching the tender colours of the sky above the house and the tall trees, her heart was lifted with an ache of beauty. She seemed to dwell again in the rapture of that golden moment when she had experienced a kind of intoxication of power and ease and beauty that she had to know, to reach, again. . . . Sounds in the kitchen, the smell of fresh biscuits, her dear old Buster racing suddenly around the house. . . . She ran lightly up the porch steps, up the stairway, and stood breathing quickly, with shining eyes, in the dear secret intimacy of her own room.

Chapter IV

I

THE last days at school passed in an exciting rush that still had a dreamlike quality. The Seniors were suddenly elevated to a kind of equality with their teachers. The class felt itself a class again, as it had done at that first meeting in the English room. People who had seemed to belong irrevocably to it were gone—Neva; Winnie; Ivanhoe Atwater, who had finally dropped out of school and was driving a delivery wagon. The few who had started into kindergarten together—Marjorie, Kat, Harry Ryan, Louie Bassett—seemed now to form the nucleus of the class. But a new equality was apparent, because they would all go through the graduation together. Susie Belle Biggerson, Glenn Dale, George Rooney, with all the old jokes and significances that had gathered about them, seemed to mean more now, in a way, than "the girls" themselves. There would still be the girls after school was over; but it was strange to feel that all the years of association with these others were gone.

Glenn Dale was now wearing a tiny moustache in addition to the curls that dangled above his eyebrows. Was it a moustache—or had he forgotten to wash all of his face, as Jessie swore? No, it was a moustache. He meant to have it. He stopped Marjorie and Kat in the corridor, and pompously asked if—now that they were at the parting of the ways—they would not exchange calling-cards with him. He drew from his pocket a thick package of visiting-cards, and neatly detached the first two, with the tissue paper still clinging.

MR. GLENN VIRGIL DALE

The old familiar routine of classes was broken up now by the practice of orations, and by special meetings. The long halls and the wide staircases sounded with a constant going back and forth that had a sense of excitement and change under its monotony.

They could never—any of the girls—believe in the last afternoon, when they took all of their books, even the little scratch tablets and the stumps of pencils, away from their desks in the sunny assembly room, and went together down the wide cement walk . . . laughing, wondering whether Glenn Dale would play his flute in the graduation exercises, aware of the bright glint of the sun on the brass rods of the big schoolhouse door, of the warm flowering out of the bushes along the south wall, the shine of the long windows. . . .

2

The house was changed now, filled with a turmoil of sewing. The Balcom sisters—two little seamstresses whom Mrs. Phillips sometimes employed, and who were going about from house to house making graduating outfits—had the big front room upstairs. Marjorie had refused to have Minnie Clapsaddle. Grandma and Grandpa Blossom were "in poor health" now, and unable to come from Shell Rock; but Aunt Bessie was here. She had offered to make all of Marjorie's underwear for graduation. When she had gone to meetings of her three clubs and of the Aid Society in Shell Rock, she had been carrying pieces of fine cross-barred muslin or strips of tatting to work on, in her fancy-work bag of Persian ribbon. Even Marjorie was awed by the beautifully made garments that were taken out of the old valise that Aunt Bessie had had checked, and spread out on the brass bed in the guest room. All the ladies who came to the house —Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Cole, Mrs. Patterson—went up to look at them and exclaim over them.

"Oh, Bessie, I don't see how you do such work! Just look at those stitches!"

And now that Aunt Bessie was here, Marjorie got out of helping with the housework. "Oh, you go on and practise your piece," Aunt Bessie always said. "I enjoy doing things in somebody else's house for a change." Marjorie was in a satisfying rush of things all the time now—kept late at school every night, either practising for the graduation program, or attending meetings to decide between class rings and class pins and go down to the job-printing place to importantly look over the make-up of the programs. Mr. Prosser said that "there had been comment" about the play last year, in which one of the characters had smoked a cigarette and used a swear word, and that it was best to stay away from those things altogether and stick to the old programs. But she and Mary Monroe were the only girls on the program. Mary Monroe was to deliver her oration, and Marjorie to read *The Wooing of Hiawatha.*

She ran up the steps and into the hall, which was excitingly full of strange wraps—Aunt Bessie's nice sailor hat with the white ribbon, and the two funny little flowered headpieces of the Balcom sisters dangling side by side from the hall-tree.

In the parlour, her presents were spread out upon two tables, those that had come in boxes carefully tilted up in the covers. They were the things that had been given to her, to Marjorie Elizabeth Schoessel. . . . She was uplifted by the feeling of splendour, of richness, that they added.

The different patterns of the eleven silver spoons that lay in tissue paper in their oblong, white, shiny boxes . . . the two white fans, one of spangled gauze, the other with hand-painted wreaths of tiny flowers . . . Hummer's present, a grandiose white box with raised flowers on the cover, and a comb, brush, hand mirror and hat brush embedded in Prussian blue silk. . . . They gave an air of exciting festivity to the whole region of the parlour, where the big fern was set back from the window to make room for them, and

where there were tiny bits of ribbon and of tissue paper upon the floor.

There was just one little thing wrong, although nothing could have made her admit it. She knew how much papa and mamma had done for her this year. Her presents were beautiful. Neighbours, Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mrs. Patterson, looked them over with a watchful eye to see how their own "showed up," and younger girls came in twos and threes to view them in hushed admiration. Once Marjorie heard Bud impressively pointing out their splendours to one of his young confederates, who came in snuffling a little, his eyes eager but noncommittal, his shoes creaking as he followed Bud about the room—"She's got some pretty fine presents here, I tell you now. I gave her a pretty good present now myself. This ain't all she's got. She's got things to wear, and a lot like that upstairs I can't show you. I tell you, Bill, you and me ud be pretty glad to have all the money these presents represent." . . . But papa's and mamma's present, a little manicure set of white ivory from the drug store, did not make a showing among the things that the other girls had—Kat's watch, and Mildred's lavallière. Neva was finishing her course at the convent, although she was going back for a special year of music. The Coles had given her a diamond ring. Neva had visited school, looking a little remote and superior, with her fair hair done in the new kind of rolls. The ring had a sharp, distinguished exquisiteness upon her smooth right hand.

It was hard to know that when the girls were going away from the house, they were saying: "I thought Marjorie's folks would give her more than that!"

She went into the livingroom, feeling suddenly grumpy and tired, and complaining about Mr. Prosser.

"Oh, dear me, Mr. Prosser won't worry you much longer," her mother soothed her. "Forget Mr. Prosser. Run upstairs and bring me your old white slip from the closet."

"Oh, mamma, why do you want that slip? You aren't sewing. I just can't bear to *move*."

"Yes, go and get it. Aunt Bessie wants it."

"Oh, dear! Well . . ."

She went into her own room. Silence . . . then: "*Mamma!*" A rush of feet down the hall. She whirled into the front bedroom, where the Balcom sisters were smiling significantly as one cut and the other basted—hugged her mother, hugged Aunt Bessie—then flew into her room again.

She hadn't seen a thing at first, except that the room was different. Then she knew why. Her little old white furniture was gone, packed into the attic—all except the bookcase. There were a chiffonier, little cane-bottomed chairs, dressing-table, bed, all of Circassian walnut—the very set that she and Kat had picked out for theirs in the furniture catalogue that papa had brought to the house a few months ago.

Her mother and Aunt Bessie followed her, eagerly smiling and demanding wistfully: "Is it a surprise?"

"A surprise! Why, Mamma Schoessel! I no more . . . oh, I've got to look at my darling dressing-table again!"

This was what they had been planning—why mamma had raised her eyebrows when Mrs. Fitz. had asked a question! They had let her think that the little manicure set was all. She was awed by the thought of how well papa and mamma had deceived her; that she, with all her vaunted perception, had been completely taken in by them! She caught Aunt Bessie by the shoulders and hugged her, shaking her reproachfully.

"Aunt Bessie Blossom! You knew that and you didn't tell me. Aren't you *ashamed?*"

"Margie, you funny girl! Do you think I have to tell you everything I know?"

"Of course. I'm very, very surprised at you, Aunt Bessie."

But she was almost shamed by the magnificence of the gift—when she knew that the Robertses hadn't paid for that big funeral, and that papa had had all the expense of the steel casket. The mute testimony of the satiny-brown furni-

ture, with its odd wavy grain that she wanted to stroke, eat —she scarcely knew what—to their thought for her, was almost more than she could bear.

The trouble was—now, how could she ask them to send her away next year? And she wanted that more even than Circassian walnut. She was sobered, humbled, puzzled by the queer mix-up of things, as she sat down on the snowy counterpane of the new bed.

3

Marjorie looked into the new mirror in which the shining, retreating vision of the room was changed. Her red roses lay with damp fresh stems upon a newspaper on the bed. Chub Patterson had given them to her—only Chub Patterson. But to have had a boy send her roses made the evening all complete. She tried to stand quietly while Aunt Bessie fastened on her hair-ribbon.

"You must run over to see old Mrs. Putz before you go. You know she can't get out to hear the exercises. Let her see that you're wearing her pin. Take your roses," her mother called after her. "She'll want to see them, too."

She ran lightly across the lawn in her white slippers, thrilled by the shimmery, crisp floating of her white dress . . . around past the bleeding-heart bushes in Mrs. Putz' side yard, and up the two dingy wooden steps to the sloping front porch, into the dark little parlour.

"Well, so you're all ready! My, I wish I's going to hear ye!"

She had to stand while old Mrs. Putz felt of her ribbons, lifted up her skirt to see the tatting that Aunt Bessie had made for her petticoat. The thin, mottled old hands touched and stroked her admiringly. Orpha had on her one white summer dress, of an ancient style, with a full bertha and a ruffle around the bottom of the skirt. She was going to the exercises. Old Mrs. Putz was too lame to go.

"Jist look at that! Look at all that work, would ye?

Well, I tell ye, it's pretty bad to be old and have to miss things. I never thought of missing the exercises until these last two years."

She accepted all their admiration, a little shyly—their declaring that she "made a picture with those roses." But she felt in some exalted plane far above the Putzes, with their sorrows and their age. She went flying back across the lawn in the early June evening. The roses, held lightly in her arms, with the feel of their fresh leaves and smooth stems from which Aunt Bessie had cut the thorns, filled her with a trembling wordless ecstasy.

And that it should be such a night—the sky a deep cool blue, with one little crystal star up above the tops of the maples. The leaves had been opening warmly on the great trees all day. They caught the fragrance of the bridal wreath as they passed the Phillips house. The "girl" called after them, and they stopped. Mrs. Phillips came hurrying out to the porch, rustling in her close-fitting, beaded silk. They were not to walk. They were to go with her and Mr. Phillips in the automobile. A discussion ensued as they stood there on the sidewalk. Aunt Bessie thought there would not be room for her, that she ought to go on with Ed and the boys. Mr. Phillips would not hear to that. Marjorie sat between her mother and Aunt Bessie on the back seat, with her white skirts spread carefully over their laps.

There was a strange glory behind the scenes at the opera house, where they all were tiptoeing about in a kind of hilarity of nervousness. The boys tried to be facetious, to burlesque the occasion. They teased Fish Carter, who had learned only at the last moment that he was to be permitted to get his diploma. The girls took turns at the little eye-holes in the opera-house curtain, with its faded representation of a "Venetian scene."

Kat whispered exultantly: "I see Hummer! He's brought a girl!"

Marjorie put her eye to one of the little holes, startled when

the stage door opened and the breeze made the curtain ripple. She looked out eagerly—saw her mother and father and Aunt Bessie, dear little old Bud in his new suit and with his new pompadour haircut. Yes, Rich was actually sitting with "the folks" and Eva was with some of the older town girls! She saw Hummer and his girl. Everyone was here—except Buster. She had gone out on the lawn and said good night to Buster, encircling his shaggy neck carefully and lightly with her arms, whispering on some sudden childish impulse: "Buster, do you know Margie's going to graduate?"

"Kid, I see Glenn Dale's mother—look!"

A little dressed-up, effusive woman with hair crimped above her gold-rimmed spectacles. She sat proud of her boy among the graduates, thinking it was a fine thing for him to be playing in the orchestra.

The dingy old opera house, with its abruptly sloping aisles and its coop of a balcony, was changed. It had windows only on one side, but these were open, and the air of the June evening stirred the programs occasionally, seemed to mingle with the movement of the fans. The high-school orchestra members, in their best dresses and suits, sat just below the stage. The Juniors had been out to the woods and got branches of wild crab-apple in bloom. The branches were drooping a little now in the warm air, but the blossoms with their pink-stained petals were festive even on the dingy stage of the opera house with its warped floor.

Mr. Prosser was behind the scenes, conferring with the teachers, blandly approving everything, now that the program had been arranged to suit him. The girls heard Harry Ryan urging something—"Let's all get together this week now and put this thing through." Kat and Marjorie did not stay to hear what, but rushed out to the wings, where they hugged each other and laughed wildly. Susie Belle Biggerson had her hair curled, and was not wearing her glasses. Glenn Dale was explaining with importance that he had to go down and play with the orchestra and then

come back to the stage and receive his diploma. That set the girls off again.

"Get back here! It's going to begin."

The ancient curtain—which did duty alike at graduation exercises, temperance meetings, Decoration Day programs, *Way Down East,* and the performances of hypnotists—waveringly rose, thumping the floor. The Girls' Chorus filed upon the platform from the two wings. They were in white, except for one girl in faded pink who had tearfully told the music teacher that she couldn't have a white dress. Some of the audience whispered angrily: "Why did they let that girl wear the coloured dress? Spoils the whole thing." The girls glanced at one another, afraid to start, wanting someone to lead them. The strong hard voice of the music teacher started them; and then the other voices joined in—very weak in the alto parts, breathy, and yet with a clear birdlike soprano trill in which there was some faint, exquisite sense of early morning. It was the song that the Chorus had been practising all year, that the pupils staying on the four o'clock list had heard until they knew it by heart.

'Tis thy wedding morning
Shining in the skies . . .

Jessie stood at the end of the first row, among the altos. She had been winking at Hummer and Percy Franklin and other favourites through the eyehole in the curtain. But now there was that vibration, small and solitary, in her voice; a pathos about her as she looked straight ahead of her with her shining, greyish-green eyes, as if she were singing to herself.

Those who were to take part on the program were nervously going over their lines. There was a unity among them—a sudden friendliness between Marjorie and Louie Bassett, who had spoken very warily to each other since the incident of the debate.

Even Louie Bassett had importance to-night. His pink cheeks and curly hair, his pink eyelids, were fresh and clean

above the shining white collar that the other boys derided. Louie Bassett had chosen his oration because he wanted it —*Charles Dickens, the Master of Humour and Pathos.* He had not simply marked it off on the list presented by Mr. Prosser, because it looked as if it would not take much work. His voice shook at first. But people were listening to him. Marjorie was amazed to see Rich (she was peeping from the wings) scowl and fish for his handkerchief under pretence of doing something else. After all that Rich had said about Louie Bassett and his bicycle!

It got more applause than Mary Monroe's oration on *The Rise of American Womanhood*—in which she mentioned Betsy Ross, Martha Washington, the mother of Lincoln, Clara Barton, Frances E. Willard, Mrs. Grover Cleveland, and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt. Mary Monroe and Guy Wiggins had the highest standing for the four years. But Marjorie and Louie Bassett were chief on the program. Louie Bassett offered to hold Marjorie's roses.

The Schoessel family sat rigid as they saw Marjorie come forward to the cross that Mr. Prosser had marked in chalk at the edge of the platform. Rich cleared his throat and looked hard at the decorations on the ceiling. Ed Schoessel fished uneasily in one of his pockets. Hummer sat staring straight at Marjorie and grinning.

Her white dress had a crisp, flimsy shimmer as she walked nicely up to Mr. Prosser's cross. They saw the hot pink of her cheeks, the smoothness of her dark brown hair, the slight trembling of her hands . . . although her face was composed, her brown eyes shining and remote. Her voice was clear and sweet, with breath that caught just a little. They had been hearing the "piece" all week; but now it had a transformed, eventful sound.

"As unto the bow the cord is . . ."

They listened in an agony of pride and apprehension to her cool girlish voice, that went so clearly through the lines, that spoke with such unconscious sweetness of tone. . . .

"And her eyes were very dreamy."

Tears, proud and helpless, flooded her mother's eyes.

She got through it beautifully. Mrs. Phillips leaned forward, caught Etta's eye, smiled and nodded vigorously. People had the gratified look that follows a successful performance. Rich looked down, flushed under his freckles, clapping doggedly. Bud's ingenuously proud and shining eyes made people smile to themselves. Hummer was grinning broadly, and was the last one to stop applauding.

Marjorie walked primly to the wings. Then she caught Jessie and pranced about on her tiptoes, suddenly warm and elated. She had a quick hot desire to do it all over again, immediately. For a moment, she had lived again in that wonderful exalted ease and possession of herself. She could not lose the feeling of hot exaltation, could not put out of her mind lines that kept repeating themselves, with more and more meaning. She took her roses from Louie Bassett.

"That sure was great," he said admiringly.

"Yours was, too."

The roses lay rich and dark red among their ferns and smooth leaves. The night was wonderful—her flowers—the white dresses of the girls. . . .

People were anxious to get through the remainder of the program. The orations, of course, were too many and too long. There were coughs, shiftings of weight, turnings and rustlings. The audience "didn't care for the orations"—had been interested only in the music, in Louie Bassett's speech, and in Marjorie Schoessel's reading. They were waiting to see the diplomas presented, when there would be a personal interest in hearing the names called, in seeing how each of the class responded, a dramatic enhancement of personalities.

Ushers placed a row of folding chairs—that Hummer had brought from the store in the afternoon—at the rear of the stage. Twenty-four white rolls, tied with old rose and grey ribbons, were piled up on a small table. People looked at their programs—booklets of thick white paper, with ele-

gantly rough edges and tasselled cords of rose and silver—finding a dramatic importance in the names (in full) of the graduating class. In Old English type:

Class Colours ..... Old Rose and Silver Grey.
Class Flower ..... American Beauty Rose.
Class Motto ..... They conquer who think they can.

Most of these names had an importance to-night that they would achieve only once—possibly twice—again: in the announcements of their weddings, and in their obituaries.

What on earth were they waiting for now? The president of the school board—the banker, B. H. Franklin, father of Percy—took his seat beside the small table, crossed his legs, hitched himself up in his chair, rubbed his moustache and the bristles of his chin. The music teacher sailed down to the piano again. She made several motions of beginning, let her plump hands lie on the keys, smiled archly and "batted her eyes" (as Bud whispered disgustedly to Rich); then, with imposing emphasis of attack, struck loudly into a Sousa March.

The class—the boys awkward, some of them pale; the girls in a kind of trance, in their white dresses, with their flowers—marched upon the platform self-consciously out of step with the music, sat down in the folding chairs, some of the boys with a scared uneasy look as they felt the precarious frailness of their support. The music flourished, dramatically stopped. The music teacher sat back smiling, wanting her little bit of attention even if she were only an adjunct to the main performance of the evening. Silence. Clearing of throats.

Of course, Mr. Franklin—a small, neat, dry-voiced man with a little moustache—had to go through those same phrases that he had repeated at every graduating program for eight years. "These young people . . . going forth into the world . . . excellent staff of teachers and worthy superintendent, Mr. Prosser . . . congratulate these young people upon having worthily finished the tasks set for them and now graduating into the larger field of life . . ." Who

wanted to listen to all that again? People wiggled, played with their programs, until the giving out of the diplomas was reached. Mr. Franklin read each name with a dry, impressive emphasis. There was always a stirring among relatives in the audience. Each pupil was waiting for his own name, that came with a new and strange and flattering significance. There was a titter at some of the middle names, concealed until now. "Herbert Augustus Carter." Even Fish was grinning shamefacedly as he shambled up to the small table.

Marjorie was waiting tensely for her name.

"Marjorie Elizabeth Schoessel."

It had come, she was taking her diploma, she was living in that moment now . . . it was over, echoing still in her mind.

"Guy Bishop Wiggins."

Guy Wiggins—tall, gangling, fiercely bashful—they would not see him debate again, craning his long neck and shaking one bony finger with awkward emphasis at his "opponents."

"Katherine Gladys Wilcox."

That had always been the last name on the class roll.

People began to search for their light wraps, to crane their necks to find other people from whom they had been separated, to motion and beckon. Mr. Prosser had to command silence so that the Lutheran minister could pronounce the benediction. He had been chosen because he would have the sense to make it short, unlike the sonorous invocation by the Reverend Monroe, whom they had had to ask because Mary Monroe was in the graduating class. People waited only until the Amen was over. Then excited bustle, noise, crowding around the stage and the graduates, smiles, pride, relief, curiosity to "get a close look at the dresses."

The Schoessels refused to let Mr. Phillips drive them home. It was over now. There was a big black smudge upon one of the white slippers. They could walk, and let Mr. Phillips take Grandma Cole, who was feeble.

They went out into the blue June night. Everyone was

in a warm relief of talkative excitement. There were things to be gone over—the surprising success of Louie Bassett's oration, how amazingly different Susie Belle Biggerson had looked. The girls did not run off together to-night. Each walked with her own family—even Kat. Marjorie walked between her mother and father, with Bud and Aunt Bessie close behind them—carrying her flowers, her fan, her ribboned diploma. They had not waited for Rich, but when they were about a block from the opera house, he caught up with them.

"Hey! Pity you can't wait for a fellow. What's the mad rush?"

"Why, we didn't know you were coming home with *us!*"

"Follow along, Rich," his father said genially. "Give your Aunt Bessie two cavaliers."

A warm satisfaction flooded Marjorie's heart. The beautiful, beautiful night—her night. Her "piece" had gone well. Chub Patterson had sent her the roses. Everything was complete. . . . Papa was so quiet, you never expected him to say things like "two cavaliers." She hugged his arm, feeling contentedly the firm, protective stiffening of the muscles.

The boys each gave an arm to Aunt Bessie.

"Come on, Aunt Bessie. Be a sport," Rich said.

She laughed, pleased, a little flustered. She let one carry her ribbon bag and one her Japanese paper fan.

"We've got a better girl than old Hummer," Bud cried.

"Yes, but your father's ahead of you. He's got *two* girls."

"We must put those roses in water so they'll keep," Aunt Bessie said.

They kept exclaiming about the night; and papa, although he did not say much, lifted his head and drew a kind of breath as he saw the blue darkness of the sky, and the stars. The trees stood duskily spreading. Lights were turned on and off in houses. Lighted squares of windows had a golden mellowness in the June evening. They caught the rich breath of the thick grass, the fragrance of the peonies

and late fruit blossoms. There was a sense of relaxation, quiet, and yet with a thrill of warm hilarity.

Their house was welcoming—the dark familiar hall, the parlour where the presents were spread . . . to be looked at and talked over again before they were put away. As if they had been gone a long while, Ed said: "Well, here we are home again!" They sat down to talk over the program. Marjorie perched on the piano stool, turning and playing little meaningless trills of music to cover the bright excitement that was still singing through her. They laughed over Aunt Bessie's amazed discovery that one of the boys in the graduating class had a moustache.

"That's to dust off his flute with before he gets it in his mouth," Rich explained.

"Well, sir," Bud declared pompously, after a little pause, "there was two good ones on the program. And I'll tell you who they were if you want to know. They were Marjorie Schoessel and Louie Bassett."

"Wasn't Louie Bassett a surprise!"

"They were all good," Aunt Bessie asserted. "It was a lovely program."

Rich struck an attitude and declaimed: "They canquer who think they cahn!"

Rich was back again for this one evening, a part of the family.

Marjorie listened with bright eyes to all the discussion. She nibbled one of the pieces of chocolate cake that Aunt Bessie brought in from the kitchen after her father had said: "Isn't there a little food around here somewhere, girls?" and the boys had applauded. But her mind was thrillingly preoccupied.

"Do you folks know what time it is?" Rich demanded. "It's exactly one-thirty!"

"Oh, Rich—it can't be that really!"

"Look at the clock if you don't believe me."

"Well, gee, we've got only one more chance to stay up late to see a Schoessel kid graduate," Bud said.

Even after they had gone upstairs, it was hard to quiet down. The boys kept talking for a long time, discussing the orations and which girl looked prettiest. Aunt Bessie clipped the stems of Marjorie's roses and laid them in water in the bathtub. As long as the roses lasted, graduation would not quite be over.

Marjorie had to look into the mirror again before she took off her graduating-dress, amazed and elated by the strange shine of her eyes under her softly dishevelled hair. She folded the dress and laid it away in her cedar chest, the spangled fan tucked away with it. She could still hear the music, still feel herself stepping forward to receive her diploma, and Mr. Franklin saying: "Marjorie Elizabeth Schoessel." Lines from *The Wooing of Hiawatha* said themselves over in her mind, and would not be still . . . "With the red deer on his shoulders" . . . "Be the moonlight, firelight, starlight, Be the sunlight of my people." . . . She thought of Jessie winking through the eyehole, of Glenn Dale's moustache and high white collar, of the roses and the blue night sky. Now all the hurts and disappointments and tedium of her high-school days were drowned under the beautiful blue of the night. Things would go on being different, transformed, exalted, as they were to-night. Nothing would ever be the same old way again. . . .

She heard the chickens in Mrs. Putz' yard make drowsy sounds in the still damp morning before she turned her head on her smooth pillow and finally went to sleep.

4

The excitement of graduation lasted a little while; and then everything seemed to slacken. Marjorie kept her roses until they began to stain the sides of the vase. The presents had to be put away. Aunt Bessie went back to Shell Rock. The town settled down into the routine of summer.

The town . . . it was as if she had never realized what

the town was like before. The brick-paved Main Street, the tree-lined roads, the red courthouse, the walk that led to the schoolhouse, had always been irradiated by a personal excitement and expectation. What was gone? For the first time, she seemed to realize the streets, the teams from the country, the slow rattle of drays across the brick pavements, the automobiles that were constantly growing more plentiful around the courthouse where the iron hitching-rails still stood. People lived here, just lived on and on, kept stores, waited on customers, went down town to buy things for supper. . . .

Her mother urged her to rest—but what "rest" was there in just sticking at home, helping a little with the housework, taking a bath and lying down after dinner, then dressing and going down town with mamma or over to see Orpha Putz in the evening? Even Harry Ryan wasn't in town, to slave over getting up picnics. He wanted to go to college next year, and had gone out selling books for the Uplift Company.

There were the girls, of course. But like most crowds, the S. S. organization was breaking up now that high school was over. The things that they had done together had somehow lost meaning. It was no longer fun to go in a bunch to the band concert on the courthouse lawn in the hot summer evening; to buy popcorn, or all go to Willis' for sundaes; to separate and try to find each other again in the crowd; to giggle when they saw Glenn Dale with a tall, elderly maiden, and to walk past the couple with elaborate innocence. Underneath the loss of interest in these old pursuits was the secret knowledge that she no longer had interest in the boys whom they had seen at the band concerts, had stopped and talked with, the two crowds eventually shifting and going on in couples or groups of three. They could not give her the things she wanted—they would interfere. The life that had been so crammed with meaning in every tiniest detail had lost that meaning now.

She rediscovered her ancient haunt in the tree-house. It

was rickety now, but still she liked to climb up there. She made Buster go with her, just as she used to do, his blunt claws rattling on the wooden steps. He flumped down, with his head between his paws, his liquid doggy eyes looking up, pathetically ready for notice, from the shaggy fur. She took soda crackers with her, and a queer assortment of books—romantic novels from the library, old things that she had dug out from their own shelves. "Where did we get this book?" "That old thing? Goodness, I don't know where it came from. It must have belonged to Aunt Bessie." The books made her dissatisfied, impatient with Buena Vista. She wanted to "learn things"—to go where people wore evening dress, and where there were butlers and grate fires and afternoon tea . . . people hailing a passing taxicab, and casually going on board an ocean liner . . . where you could see real authors, and artists. . . .

She spent an afternoon re-reading *Alice in Wonderland* for the first time in years. The old dreamy magic came back. She ranged among the family books of poetry: odd volumes of Tennyson, Phœbe and Alice Cary, Whittier and Longfellow, Owen Meredith, Jean Ingelow, and a morocco-bound anthology ordered from an agent. She read dreamily, lonesomely, through these books, skipping half the poems. Words, phrases here and there, sang in her mind, brought that mingled longing and satisfaction. She liked the little high soprano note, that answered to something which she dimly sensed as her own. No one could hear her up in the maple. She was safe. She got a strange elation from whispering over to herself some of these things—*High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire, The Lady of Shalott, The Song of Seven.*

> In the morning, oh, so early,
> My belovèd, my belovèd,
> All the little birds were singing
> As if never they would cease. . . .

Of course, these were not pieces that would "do to give"—

like things from Riley. They were a kind of indulgence, filling her at the same time with elation and helpless dissatisfaction, not fitting into her life.

The summer sunshine lay in long aisles and long shadows across the rich green lawn. It sifted through the maple leaves. She could look down, could see the open door across the alley, catch the faint dry scent of hay; see old Mr. Bishop's buggy standing out in the burning sunshine; see the hot-coloured zinnias and nasturtiums in Mrs. Putz' yard. Bud had made a bird-house in manual-training class and fastened it on a long pole near the maple. She could look up from her book, hear the twittering and busy hopping, see little bright eyes and soft breasts. Old Buster, lying near her, opened one cautious eye. There was a happiness here that was steeped in a queer new loneliness, comforted only by the flutterings of the birds, and the good, shaggy presence of the old dog.

It was just as when she used to bring her grievances up here to mull over all by herself—that mamma had made her wash the dishes instead of going to Neva's; or had said that she couldn't stay later than eleven at a party. She knew, with a rebellious stiffening of all her muscles, that now that she was through with high school, papa and mamma wanted to keep her near them. They urged Rich in every possible way to go to Ames and take an engineering course —to get away from Eva—they would have sent him anywhere. But they didn't want her to go away from them. They were proud of her—but they thought that what she wanted to do didn't really matter. They said that she could get a fine course at Tubbs College. Mrs. Shrader there had been on the Chautauqua. But she didn't want to stay in Wahseta, only a few miles from home; to live with Aunt Clara and Uncle John, and to go about with her cousins, Ethel and May. They said after she had had a year at Tubbs, "they would see." Oh, it was . . . everything.

She felt all the time the uncomprehended pain of some

mysterious division within her being. She had felt it when she was at Blue Lake with Mr. and Mrs. Phillips a few weeks ago—a sharp cleavage between the kind of pleasure that she had in the pavilion and the dances, and the kind that mysteriously came to her in moments alone on the dock . . . watching the waves come smoothly in with light spilled upon them, changing and changeless, slapping the dock and the row-boats and launches with a secret sound. Mr. Phillips let her have a little bank-book that he no longer used, and she kept in it the names of sail-boats:

Elizabeth Ord.
Whitewing.
Maid of the Foam.

The slant of sails had a different joy than the quick neat cutting of the prow of a launch through the bright water. Although she still yearned, in a way, for the glories of the pavilion, she kept wanting to sit alone on the beach; or to walk out to the end of the dock, over the rough boards with the water bright, dark and moving beneath the cracks, and to feel the perilous, half-dizzy, melancholy joy of standing there, with the water spreading all about her, slapping the wet piles.

She could not make her father and mother see why she wanted to go East, what she meant, why she couldn't wait a year but must go now. When Tubbs could give her "practically the same thing."

It was her new bedroom furniture that was responsible for the compromise. It stood there, mute unanswerable witness to all that papa and mamma had done for her, all the things they had given her. . . . Once she ran up to her room for the express purpose of standing in the middle of the floor, looking into the mirror, and declaring to her own self that she *hated* the furniture, wished she didn't have it . . . but when she was actually standing there, her clenched hands relaxed, and the eyes which she saw in the glass looked hurt and softened. She could not harden her heart to reproach

and defy her Circassian walnut. She thought of papa and Hummer bringing it into the house, carrying it carefully up the stairs, of papa and mamma and Aunt Bessie getting it all in place while she was away at school. When she saw its satiny shine, she could not oppose. She would have to go to Tubbs . . . and then, next year, she would go away.

PART III

Chapter I

I

THE two Miss Balcoms were at the house again, making up the black *crêpe de chine* that had been bought in Wahseta and a pink *marquisette* that was to do for parties and recitals both. As soon as Aunt Bessie had heard that Marjorie was going East, she had written at once for Marjorie's present measurements and demanded to know what was needed in the matter of underwear. Someone had told her that it got very cold in Boston, and she was making four flannel nightgowns after a pattern that she had found in the Sunday paper. . . . What would they have done without Aunt Bessie! She was always to be counted upon—as her relatives, and as most of the people in Shell Rock, had very good reason for knowing. She had helped out in every crisis of the Schoessel family; whenever there was illness, had come and taken charge of things. She had made the white china silk dress in which Marjorie had made her first platform appearance, on the Children's Day program at the church, when Marjorie was three.

Ed did not see why there was so much of this getting ready to be done. If Marjorie found when she got to Boston that she needed something that she didn't have, she could get it, couldn't she? He supposed there might be stores in Boston.

"Oh, well, papa doesn't understand," Etta said. "He thinks if you need a thing, just go into a store and buy it! As if things could be done as easily as that!"

The family had never been permitted to do their shopping outside of Buena Vista. Papa expected people there to buy

furniture from him, so he ought to buy other things from them. But after the Wahseta stores, where she had gone with Ethel and Aunt Clara last year, Marjorie could not be satisfied with those in Buena Vista. Patterson's—she knew exactly what it would have every fall. Three rolls of cloth in the window, half unrolled and propped up against other cloth—brown, green and navy-blue serge, exchanged after three weeks for brown, green and plaid silk. She would be away all winter. People would not have to know just where she had bought every article. She and her mother spent a day in Wahseta, and Aunt Clara and Ethel shopped with them—Ethel wildly envious and admiring because Marjorie was going East.

One thing she must do, however—she must buy a hat from Miss Finch. Miss Finch expected it. She came to the door of the millinery store, nodded in her bright way, and called out: "Come in one of these days! I've got just the thing for Margie!"

"Now we'll have to go into Miss Finch's or she'll feel badly," mamma said.

"Oh, mamma, I *don't* want to buy a hat there to wear in *Boston!*"

"Why, I think Miss Finch has very nice hats."

"Mamma!"

There was compromise. A small inexpensive hat for travelling and "every day" could be bought from Miss Finch, and Marjorie herself could pick out a "best hat" when she got to Boston.

When she was a little girl, no store in town except Cole's and her father's had been more fascinating than Miss Finch's. It was a little one-story frame building squeezed in between the hardware store and the real-estate office. In each of its two show-windows stood three iron standards surmounted with hats. The middle standard was the tallest, and the middle hat cost the most. When Marjorie and Neva and Kat had gone home from school past Miss Finch's,

each of them had always tried to be the first to cry: "The one in the middle's mine!"

But she was accustomed to the standards of the two department stores in Wahseta now. She scorned the old, faintly musty odour of Miss Finch's show-room; the funereal glass counters, in the first of which were flowers, silver and gilt ornaments, the breasts and tail feathers of birds, and, in the other, cylindrical rolls of satin and taffeta ribbon, reds, blues, blacks, with an occasional stripe or check for those who "liked something a little different." The girls had once gazed with awe upon the choicest hats, which were always kept in the glass cases across the room from the counters. From the green-painted drawers below, Miss Finch would fish up tam-o'-shanters, untrimmed shapes, high-crowned felt hats with elastics, baby bonnets. Nothing in the world had been more fun than to try on hats before the long, brown-framed mirror that was tilted forward, producing a queer dwindling view of the room . . . going after school to try on hats at Miss Finch's, on stinging fall days, or in the early spring when the mud was fresh on the crossings and there was a damp thrill in the air. She and Neva looking at ornaments in the glass counter, both deciding to offer prayers next Sunday in church, that Miss Finch would let them have a little feather tip or a glazed flower from some bouquet to trim their doll hats. And then they used to go out into the dark back room, where the Salzbauer girls worked, and where Miss Finch's canary hung, and rescue scraps of ribbon and "trimmings" and those big wooden spools for ribbons with the paper all unrolled. . . .

Slowly, the things that Marjorie was to take with her were being assembled upon the wide brass bed in the guest room. She would be ripping away at her old net dress, which was to be made into a slip and linings—and all at once, she would have to go into that room and look over things, alone, in that peculiar guest-room silence, the air that was a little chill, a little stale. . . . The silk of the black dress was softer

because it was going to be worn in Boston. Even the made-over things gave her the rich, luxurious feeling of many clothes to choose from. Everything—the night-gowns Aunt Bessie had made, towels that Bud had marked with her name, toilet articles. She had put these on the bed, too, trying to make little hollows and get the bottles of lotion and toilet water to stand upright. Her new white ivory soap case and the smooth, cream-coloured cake of complexion soap with its carved letters, its faint clean odour . . . Mrs. Phillips had given her a rubber-lined Pullman apron. The bright flowers of the cretonne cover elated her with their freshness, made her think luxuriously of dinners, of the shining windows of Pullman cars flying past little stations. Orpha Putz had made her a needle-holder of three pieces of soft white cashmere stitched in blue. She saw herself keeping all her things in perfect order when she was in Boston, never letting any holes in her gloves or stockings "go."

The feeling of travelled, grown-up elegance that these things gave her! . . . She was going to Boston, where all the very nicest girls in Buena Vista had gone, to study music or expression or physical culture. Frances Patterson, Maribel Struthers, her adored Miss Davison. She was one of them now. And Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Julia Ward Howe (whom Mrs. Davison had once heard speak), had lived there. . . . She felt of the curved heels and the crusty beads of her elegant new slippers that would cross great, shining Bostonian floors. She whispered: "I love you, slippers. I love you, too, soap. I love everything that's on this bed."

She would wear this dress, these slippers, at 72 St. John Street. Mrs. Phillips said that the street she lived on, the kind of people she got in with at the start, made all the difference to a girl. She must have an address that she wouldn't be ashamed to give to a clerk in a good shop. Mrs. Phillips had offered to write to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Fletcher, in Brookline; and the place that Mrs. Fletcher had advised, the Students' Association that was connected with a *very*

high-class Episcopal church, would be like a "certificate," Mrs. Phillips said, for Marjorie. Only girls of "nice families" could stay there—"Church girls," as Mrs. Phillips said impressively. But Mrs. Fletcher would recommend Marjorie. The matron was an Episcopalian deaconess. The patronesses were from the very best families in Boston. It would be a wonderful opportunity for Marjorie to come into contact with such people.

72 St. John Street. The Bostonian ring of that threw Marjorie into a glamour of expectation. There was an Episcopalian feeling about it . . . the combined richness and stiffness, the touch of complacent social superiority, the glow of red and purple stained glass, correct Sabbath regalia, ritual, rising and sitting and kneeling at mysterious appointed times known to the initiate, singing hymns from a little black book without the music, superior flavour of England . . . Maribel Struthers had turned Episcopalian since she had been East.

That was one superiority that Mr. Phillips had. He was such a quiet, insignificant-looking little man, would not put himself forward, would not go to lodges although Mrs. Phillips was a Past Grand Matron. But he had been born in the East and had been "raised an Episcopalian." Only a few people knew that Mrs. Phillips had really been raised a Baptist. She always said of the Congregational Church, when asked to contribute: "Of course you know this is not really our church." There had been an effort to start an Episcopal church in Buena Vista, with the Phillipses, Mrs. Cousins and Genevieve, Miss Ida Willis—Mr. Phillips the only man. They had held temporary meetings in the little abandoned Adventist church at the edge of town. But, in spite of the enthusiasm of Mrs. Phillips, there were too few of them, as people said, to make it go.

Neva and Marjorie used to play at being Episcopalians, like Neva's cousins in Connecticut. They had decided that to each other, in secret, they would always say "Holy Communion." Communion Day at the church had its own fas-

cination of ritual. The deacons creaking about in the silence, passing the baskets with little soft whitish squares of that good Communion bread that Mrs. Bradley made. The grape juice was so good, and it was so hard to get it all out of the little glass in one swallow, when Mr. Williamson made a sign and the whole congregation drank together. Then the choir breaking the solemnity of waiting, the embarrassing clatter of glasses and sound of chewing (the dreadful way old Mr. Webb chewed his Communion bread!), by singing, without the organ, and with a wailing minor sound . . .

> **Come Thou fount of; ev'ry blessing;**
> **Tune my voice to; sing Thy praise . . .**

The Communion bread was mysteriously sweet. It whetted Marjorie's appetite so terribly for the roast and potatoes in the fireless cooker at home that she could hardly stand it until church was over. She had to set her face in a painful stare to keep from giggling when Rich—with a straight, solemn look—slyly licked his chops, like Buster, after tasting the grape juice.

But the Episcopalian way was more exciting. Neva said that the rector wore a gown, that was almost like a Catholic priest's. He turned his back and did mysterious things at the altar. Then people went up, and drank out of a silver goblet . . . and then they came back, and others went up . . . Neva could not tell how they knew when it was time to go. They all drank out of the same cup, the way they had done in Buena Vista before the ladies had held the bazaar and bought the sanitary drinking service.

Once Marjorie and Neva had decided to keep Lent. They had "given up" reading the Little Colonel books—something precious to them, but less noticeable than candy, not so likely to be discovered by the boys. For a whole week they went about in an entrancement of sanctity and social superiority, mystifying the other girls. An ancient commode in a dark corner of the Schoessel attic had been their altar.

They placed upon it two old vases with gilded cat-tails that Marjorie got down from the top shelf of the pantry cupboard.

The Congregational Church had been the Church of the Pilgrims. The very nicest families in Buena Vista went to it, although the Methodist Church had a larger membership. But there was a glamour about the Episcopalian Church. Perhaps in Boston she would be an Episcopalian.

72 St. John Street, Boston . . . She went about in a dream of herself there, a confused dazzle of Episcopalianism, the Pilgrims, Longfellow, Whittier and Lowell, dropped *r*'s, the place where Paul Revere had hung his lantern, Beacon Street, tea, Plymouth Rock and the ocean, plays, music, the artistic inaccessibility of the Academy of Expression. She would at last penetrate to the very inner knowledge of clothes, her reading, the way to do things, pictures, music. Like Miss Davison, and Maribel Struthers.

But the boys said scornfully that she needn't come home dropping her *r*'s and giving a high handshake, the way Percy Franklin had tried to do.

2

The family accused her of making more fuss over leaving Buster than over leaving them. It was true. It seemed to her that people could get along. But even last year, when she had been at Wahseta, they had told her how Buster used to go through all the rooms looking for her; and whenever she had come home for Sunday, he had been so overjoyed, so pathetically excited, that it made her heart ache guiltily. Now she made Buster go everywhere with her, and stipulated that he should be allowed to lie on the parlour rug if he wanted to, until she went away.

And it seemed as if her room must be lonely, with the door closed, only a few discarded dresses in the closet. It gave her a strange feeling of remorse to see her room after the new trunk had been taken to the station—the bare

dressing-table, the empty closet. She had to think: "What if this is the last time I'm ever in this room?"

She had to go in to say good-bye to Orpha and old Mrs. Putz. On the way to the station, they passed the Phillips house. Mrs. Phillips came out and called to them.

Marjorie thought, with a thrust of wonder: "I'm really going!"

She saw the station in a daze—the purplish bricks, the tree that was now shedding yellow leaves upon the little triangle of park. She felt conspicuously a traveller—in spite of Miss Finch's hat—with her new gloves, and the leather handbag that papa had got at wholesale. The girls were at the station to say good-bye—Neva, Kat, Jessie, Mildred, Annie Jackson. They were in their summer dresses, bare-headed. The kept jesting, a little nervously; and already there was a wall between her and them—she going away, they staying. Only Neva was on an equality with her, because she and Mrs. Cole were to spend the winter in California. They talked and joked with Bud. Rich came over from the lumberyard, where he was working, and at the last minute Hummer appeared, grinning, with a big pink box of chocolates.

"Well," he said, "I thought we'd all have to come and see her off!"

That eased things, to have Hummer there to tease and be teased.

"Well, I s'pose Margie'll come back from Boston using words that none of us poor folks can understand. We'll have to order some new dictionaries to be ready."

Marjorie looked out of the window to see if there was smoke down the track; looked again at the time-table chalked on the blackboard. Anything to keep from feeling, to keep her lips from trembling.

Bud shouted: "Here she comes!"

Their faces—Hummer's with the wide grin—looked almost foolishly significant and embarrassed. Marjorie was breathing quickly as they stood waiting while the stream of

travelling men and old ladies, young women with babies, got off the train. Papa and Rich went into the coach with her and mamma, and hung about the seat; like men, of course, thinking it would be foolish to get off until the train was actually moving, and keeping mamma on needles. But at last they had to go, with hurried kisses. Marjorie looked out of the window, fearful until she saw that they were both safely on the platform. The girls followed the train for a little way, and waved. Then she saw them turning back toward the station, Jessie running and taking hold of Kat's arm. She saw Hummer, saw Mr. Bush come to the door of the waiting-room. She watched her father turn to go back to the store; and at the sight of his familiar walk, his felt hat and slightly rounded shoulders, she suddenly realized that she was going away from home, realized that it was papa's money from the store that was sending her. Now she hated her secret self for wanting, all this time, to get away from the undertaking business, from Grandpa and Grandma Schoessel's broken English; and her heart went out after her father's slowly moving figure in an agony of loyalty.

She sat back in her seat, being a travelled young lady; but all the while she was aware of Buena Vista getting less and less. She saw the empty freight cars, that row of old houses, pastures . . . the standpipe black among the tufted trees in which rust-red and thick yellow mingled with the summer green . . . the culvert . . . and oak woods. . . . They were out of town. Cornfields. Leland.

On their way now. They might as well take off their hats and put them in the hat sacks Miss Finch had given them. It would be night before they reached Chicago.

3

Their day together in Chicago, so rich and long in prospect, was over before it seemed as if it had ever been. They were both so confused by the noise in the huge roaring sta-

tion, by trying to be sure that they had found the right train, that they scarcely knew that they were parting. The gateman let mamma go with her to the train. It was noise, cinders, smoke, confusion. Just a hasty embrace, that seemed helplessly inadequate.

"Now be sure and drop mamma one of the cards tomorrow."

Marjorie was both ashamed and relieved to have mamma appeal to the porter.

"Yes, *ma'am*. Dis is youah coach."

"You'd better get on," mamma said nervously.

They could not be themselves in all this strange confusion. Marjorie scarcely realized what she was doing when she let the porter help her on—that she had left mamma, was going now.

She felt the sudden quiet and leisure of the Pullman coach. She arranged her things in her section with its green, faintly dusty upholstery. Her hands trembled a little, although she was doing everything with an amazing calmness. She had an exciting sense of riches—new things to see from the windows, towns, States, her magazine, Hummer's candy and the box from the girls, the "surprise" that mamma had put into her bag, the train letters. She could not wait to read these. She had to look at one of them now, to put out of her mind the wrench of parting that stayed with her, the feeling of the station with its grime and noise. She took Neva's. The thick white paper and large round handwriting—Neva's letters were always like that.

"DEAR MARJORIE:

"Well, I suppose by this time you are safely on your way and leaving the dear old city of Buena Vista far behind. . . ."

Neva wrote the way that people were supposed to write in letters. Jessie didn't, though. She could not resist peeping at Jessie's letter.

"Beloved Marjorie Elizabeth——"

She snuggled down into her seat.

"Be sure to wave as you go through the noble village of Leland. . . . Will be sure to let you know if we hear any really *important* news, that the Boston papers might not get, like Glenn Dale's having parted with his moustache . . . will shake hands with Buster for you when I see him, also look after Hummer while you are away and see that he doesn't do anything rash. . . ."

She smiled tremulously and tried to wink tears out of her eyes. She wanted to feel herself an easy assured traveller, like the man across the aisle who had a travelling-cap that made her think of those long vacation trips that people in magazine advertisements were having. She looked out over the flat Illinois landscape across which dusk was slowly spreading . . . tracks . . . tracks, tracks, tracks . . . a black country road, stiff from the fall wind, a horse and buggy driving along it . . .

The day in Chicago was really over, a daze of roaring streets, iron blackness and greyness, with little glimpses of hard blue sky. Tramping endlessly about Marshall Field's, seeing so many things that they wanted. It had been fun to make mamma do just as one of the girls would have done—"bum around," and ask to see clothes that she didn't intend to buy, and have lunch in Marshall Field's tea-room.

"Etta Schoessel, you've got to do everything that I say to-day. You aren't going to say that you don't want any dessert, or pay any less for your lunch than I do for mine." She had made mamma use one of the little powder envelopes that she had bought in the rest room. They had sat and watched the people. And then that woman sitting near them, who had tried to talk to them. "You're strangers in the city too, aren't you? My, this is a wonderful store, ain't it?" She had sat looking cool and disapproving while mamma talked to the woman—there were always these people in restaurants and waiting-rooms, who couldn't keep still. The amazement of hearing mamma, in the very tone of Mrs. Phillips, talk about her daughter going to school in the East! She had been hotly ashamed, murmured: "*Mamma!*" But all the same, she had wanted the woman to know

that they were not just awed, dingy, small-town people, like herself in her countrified hat and old-fashioned shoes and rubbers.

She thought about the Lake, pressed her face to the cold window glass. She could see only a great blackness. That feeling of blackness, of a little lonely train rushing through it, a narrow swaying coach with cold, blank, glassy windows—outside, deep waves of blackness in which faint, far-apart lights were reflected—stayed with her, cold and dangerous under everything. She went into the dining-car. Other little parts of her mind—that were like tiny, brightly lighted boats bobbing along on a great, deep, black sea—enjoyed the rocking of her coffee in the thick cup, studying the menu. There was a "distinguished-looking" man across from her, whose face, coldly fresh and rosy, grey hair, grey tweeds, black-rimmed eye-glasses with a cord, made her feel "out in the great world." She heard scraps of conversation about her, casually assured travellers' voices—"Cleveland . . . Philadelphia . . ."

She went back to her section feeling better, able to open her magazine and half read a story. She took her bag into the dressing-room, as Mrs. Phillips had told her to do, suddenly happy in the thought of using her new Pullman apron with all the brand-new toilet articles in the pockets. In the small square room, where the water—greenish from the lining of the bowl—kept jiggling; where that feeling of flying, flying past . . . dark cornfields, lonely roads, little towns . . . was even stronger, she relished putting on her new kimono of rose-coloured silk, that Aunt Bessie had made. The "surprise" was a cap of satin ribbon and ruffly lace—one of those that she had admired in Marshall Field's. When had mamma bought it? The possession of the cap made her bold enough to appropriate one of the little shelves for her hairpins. A large, plump-shouldered woman with waved hair and pearl ear-rings was complacently absorbing the best mirror and only chair; staring when other toilet articles

were timidly, and of necessity, inserted among hers; surveying her broad, plump, fresh-complexioned face from all angles as she leisurely rubbed cold cream over her neck—all this while the others were waiting. The woman used many towels, thinking that the railroad company furnished them and the porter was hired to pick them up, and then let them lie crumpled. With fastidious disapproval, Marjorie put hers carefully into the receptacle. But she felt small and immature, no longer really a traveller. She stayed in the dressing-room a long time, for fear that her berth might not yet be made up. . . . But suddenly, through her timidity, her queer lost feeling, broke sharp little stabs of joy at the feeling of *going,* at the water jiggling in the bowl, the blue-bordered towels . . .

She crept between the smooth, slightly chilly sheets of her berth. Not for anything would she have asked the porter how to find her light. At last she found it herself. It was a long time before she dared to turn it off.

Then again she felt the rush of the night. Perhaps this was the way the earth was rushing through a bigger blackness—it was dreadful, nothing was safe. Just this afternoon she had been with mamma . . . now she could not even see mamma if she wished. The scene from *The Servant in the House,* that she had read in the recital at Tubbs College, repeated itself in her mind—she was saying it to Mrs. Courtwick, in a great Bostonian hall, at the Academy of Expression. And then she was reading it on a great platform—coming with the Chautauqua to Buena Vista, in a pink evening gown and satin slippers. . . . She kept seeing bright, fragmentary images—the girls on the platform at home, with their bare heads and summer dresses, turning away toward the station. . . . She turned, dug her head feverishly into the pillow to get away from these things. She remembered dangers at which Mrs. Fitzpatrick had hinted, things that could happen to girls travelling alone.

When the train stopped for long, mysterious pauses at

lonely, far-apart, dimly lighted stations, she raised herself on her elbow, looked out at the brick platform.

The slight swinging of her berth comforted, and then disturbed, her. Night . . . half-sleep . . . a queer damp greyness. Interval. Early, early morning, old women going out to feed the chickens in Indiana towns.

Chapter II

I

SHE felt that she was really in New England. The people in the section just beyond hers, she imagined to be New Englanders. The man was small and neat—a little like Mr. Franklin, or Mr. Phillips—but there was a precision, too academic for spruceness, in his neatness. The bald head and the little moustache added to that collegian "refinement." The speech, too. It was New England. The firm, assured, almost ostentatiously quiet way in which these people spoke to the two little girls, who had straight hair, brushed out smooth and shining, and evenly trimmed—a kind of trim homeliness.

Marjorie kept an alert, eager watch for the New England country. Ohio had been like Iowa, only smoother, lower, older, a little dingier. This landscape had a small tight fineness, with the towns close together, the narrow streams that were clear and pebbly and cold, and with stone walls that held in bits of country. At home, the fields were spreading. There was a rankness in spite of the cultivation of the land: something big, rich, hot and burning in the autumn landscape. Cornstalks, dry and harsh, glowed sombrely against the wide blue sky. There was the largeness of the oaks in the groves and the pastures, that gave such a different feeling—an openness—to the woods where smooth brown leaves matted the rich ground. And then the great wide roll of the land, smooth, strong and plain. . . . But here, there was a hard stoniness; a delicacy about the autumn foliage for all its crimsons. The whole landscape was chastened by a Puritan rigour that was felt in the grey stone

walls, in the white churches with austerely pointing steeples.

She saw everything until her mind almost ached with the feeling of it. But she was conscious of herself, too, of a mingled eagerness and uncertainty. In all her movements —as she opened her bag and took out a fresh handkerchief, glanced out of the window—she was dramatizing herself as a member of the Students' Association, an ultra-refined Boston student and Episcopalian.

2

There was such a sense of unreality that she was surprised at the slight, uncontrollable trembling of her hands. She had on her hat and coat and gloves long before the train drew into Boston. She was dazed and confused now, and only half saw the rows of buildings from the window. Perhaps the girls from the Students' Association would not meet her, as Miss Coleman, the matron, had promised. She would get off the train and find herself "alone in a strange city." What if this station should not be the one that Miss Coleman meant! But the porter passed, and she did not ask him. For a dreadful moment she was alone on the strange platform, and the train was going on without her.

Then she saw the two girls—they must be the ones of of whom Miss Coleman had written, although they were so different from the way she had pictured them to herself. One of them was thin and stooping, with a lean face and stringy hair. Marjorie was able to answer them, as if her uncertainty and feeling of unreality did not exist. She was walking with them—in Boston. She was on Massachusetts ground.

She still felt the movement of the train, and all sense of direction was gone. The way seemed to be a senseless progress of straight lines and turnings. As she went on, between the two girls, the other Boston, the Boston that had been hers all these weeks—stately and Puritan and austere, with colonial doorways—grew dim and unreal, was

crowded out by these narrow streets with brick houses and dingy pavements.

All the time her mind was alert, even through her distress, catching the difference between these girls and the girls at home. She resented, and at the same time tentatively copied, their manner of mature assurance. She felt terrible gulfs of loneliness opening up almost under her feet, breathlessly, so that she scarcely knew whether she could keep on walking down this strange narrow street with all its alien confusion.

The girl who had spoken first at the station was Edith Robinson. Marjorie looked at her face, young, almost childish in its soft colouring and contours and unblemished skin. But her manner, her figure neat and plump in her plain, very respectable dark blue suit, suggested a matron. She was not young in the way that so many of the girls at home were young—thin, active, eager, undeveloped. Perhaps New England girls dressed this way—"nice," plain, everything "good"; perhaps her own new coat with its fancy buttons, that she had got in Wahseta, and her blue serge dress that the Miss Balcoms had made, were not right—dreadful, in some uncomprehended way. Edith Robinson seemed so sure of everything.

72 St. John Street was unreal, even while she was going with Edith Robinson up the steps. The house faced the wrong way; and the romantic light of stained glass faded before the plain, red brick façade of the tall, cramped building. She was horrified by a kind of dinginess that came from the narrowness of the street, the look of age about the long row of brick houses that might have been all one except for the slightly varied steps and railings. There was no grass, just a bare stoniness. But the long door was white and Bostonian, with a worn brass handle. This consoled her.

Edith Robinson was saying: "This is such a quiet street. And of course you can always feel here that you are perfectly safe."

Marjorie murmured: "Oh, yes." Edith Robinson would take it for granted that everyone would feel about "quiet" and "safe" as she herself did.

Inside, the house was old, in a way that no houses in Buena Vista were old. The narrow hallway, with the long stairs, was alien and forbidding in its unaccustomed city darkness.

"I'll take you right in to Miss Coleman," Edith Robinson said.

Marjorie followed silently. The tentative thrill of excitement and enjoyment that the white door, and the reach of dark city stairs, had given her, died away quickly into a wary cautiousness, an uncertainty of herself under these surroundings that made her almost afraid to say a word . . . and, all the time, with that sense of the great black gulf just beyond her feet. . . .

The large, dimly lit room with oaken furniture, in which she had always been seeing Miss Coleman, became suddenly a plain, bare office room in which a secretary in a severe shirtwaist and skirt sat writing. And here was Miss Coleman—not slender, pale, remote, moving through a religious light and fingering an ebony cross—but heavy, with a very decided stomach. Only her black dress and white cap showed that she was an Episcopal deaconess. Her hands were small and firm and plump; she had a deep-toned, assured voice.

"We are very glad to have you with us. We hope that you will enjoy the Association. Our girls do. Miss Noble, will you take our new member up to her room?"

She said it affably, but with that small, conventional New England smile that meant nothing, and made Marjorie feel helplessly uncertain and at a loss. They were kind to her. But she was a Westerner. They were not sure of her. They had never heard her name. They seemed surprised to learn that she had never met Mrs. Fletcher.

As she followed Miss Noble up the two flights of dark

stairs, she felt her throat aching with the desire for tears.

When Miss Noble left her, Marjorie went about in a tremor of amazement, conscientiously hanging up the few garments that she had brought in her bag. She could not believe that this little front room could ever be hers, with its chilly air, its cot and dresser, its one good-sized window through which she could see the red-brick houses across the street with their stone steps and iron railings. How had she thought that it would be?—A room drawn from the old boarding-school and college stories, with a flavour of Beacon Street and a glamour of Episcopalian sanctity. This was reality—small, exact, without glamour.

It was getting windy outside. Dust and little scraps were whirling drearily. The sky, that had been a hard blue, was overclouded with a grey bleakness. The ocean! She was near the ocean. She felt that when she saw the purplish-grey of the sky. No matter what happened here, at least she would see the ocean. Bud had told her to be sure and write him about the battle-ships. Even the sky was different, was a Boston sky because of the severe, significant line that those old red-brick houses cut against it. But she recognized this now with a sense of terrible desolation and none of the eagerness with which, on the train, she had discerned the difference in the look of the sky that the sharp steeples, the rocky hills, made.

She would not show that she dreaded luncheon. Edith Robinson's promise to knock on her door when it was time to go down, steadied her. But the meal in the large bare dining-room, with the strange girls chattering an alien language, and the maids going quietly about, had to be endured.

After luncheon, she had a period of dreary aimless leisure before her trunk should arrive, when she was too restless to sleep, as Miss Coleman had advised, too strange to venture down to the living-room. She tried to write to mamma.

"Dear Mamma:

"I got here safely. Two of the girls were at the station to meet me. . . ."

Tears suddenly flooded her eyes, rose without volition, as if from some deep, strange, saltily bitter well of misery.

She sat down on her cot in a cold desolation. She thought with shame and horror of that last week at home when she had gone around wrapped inaccessibly in thoughts of her own, secretly proud and glad to be going away, feeling herself really above all of them—except Buster. She could see mamma standing—at that last moment of parting—in the huge, dingy train shed of the Chicago station, with its iron roar; could hear the loudly chanted, singing calls . . . *Train—going—East.* . . . Mamma's little handkerchief squeezed up in her grey-gloved hand, and her difficult, tearful smile—and herself impatient to get on the train before mamma should cry.

Now, whenever she heard steps and girls' voices in the hall outside—when she thought that Edith Robinson might be coming to the door—she got off the cot hastily, and with ostentatious calm was arranging the toilet articles on her dresser.

3

Steps paused at her door. She had barely time to wipe the tears from her face and to be at the dresser. It was Edith Robinson. Marjorie used elaborate devices of arranging her hair and searching for a handkerchief to keep from turning directly toward Edith.

"They're having tea. Won't you come down with me?"

"Oh, thanks! Only I'm not ready."

"Let me wait for you."

Marjorie hurried to the queer, old-fashioned, chilly bathroom and eagerly sopped her eyes with cold water and gave a quick averted glance at the mirror. A little gas flame burned shakily in a tinted globe, and there were no electric lights. But she was really going to have afternoon tea, as

people did in books—she thought of writing to Neva. One of those thrills of excitement filtered through her cold misery as they went down the two flights of dark-railed stairs, her hand clasped in Edith's cool plump palm and soft fingers. Girls were clustered in the hall, patting their hands softly together and laughing about the cold, looking for letters on the heavy oak table.

In the living-room, with the grate fire, the tea-table, the strange group of girls, all of whom were so accustomed, so sure in their greetings to one another, and the way they handled their tea-cups—a warm groping for enjoyment came over her. Grate fires and afternoon tea were two of the things that she and Neva had always wanted. For a moment, she realized that she was in Boston. But under the warm glow, the alertness—the thought of home was like a wound that kept aching and then stabbing her with pain.

Edith Robinson brought her tea and found her a chair. Marjorie longed for the protection of Edith's presence to keep her from the terrible isolation of sitting silent and alone, not knowing whether she ought to take back her tea-cup. But Edith was drawn into a group of girls dominated by a large, handsome, mature girl with very red cheeks.

"Edith Robinson! You are wanted. To settle a very important question."

"Very important, exceedingly important."

Sitting by herself, drinking her tea as slowly as she could, Marjorie heard the discussion with painful acuteness above her dreadful sense of confusion. Little things came out sharply—"Maude Adams!" "Oh, no, my deah, Julier Sande'son!" She listened with awe to the familiarity with which the girls spoke these shining, inaccessible names. "Julier Sande'son," a thin homely girl with stringy hair kept repeating. The girl made her think of Mary Monroe. But she had used just the words, just the manner, of the other girls—of that large handsome girl with the red cheeks and bright grey eyes with very black lashes, with the dashing clothes that entitled her to the manner. As if the thin girl

did not know that she was haggard and school-teachery and homely. "Adorable." "Dahling." "Perfectly cunning." "*Mah*vellous!" These words came strangely from her lips, with their exaggeratedly New England accent. Mary Monroe knew what she was like, did not try to talk as the S.S.'s, and the popular girls, had talked. There was a difference in the animation of these girls. It was less spontaneous, less shrill—but set and "made," with its assured parroting of those same words over and over. "Oh, I think Fo'bes Robutson is perfectly dahling!"

The cup of amber tea with its sharp flavour of lemon had a bitter, invigorating heat. A fire crackled in the grate. The room had that special comfort of an old-fashioned, well-furnished city room—the mantel, the plain high walls, the shelves and tea-table and grand piano; and outside the long windows, the piece of windy, significant Boston street. The girls moved easily, their faces flushed from the heat of the fire after the cold wind. The patroness who was pouring tea was thin, but of ample and imposing bosom, dressed with a pleasant exciting sense of richness. The movements of her thin ringed hands among the cups were strong and assured. There came from her a dark shine of silks in the fire glow, a subdued gleam of gold, a rustle, a feminine scent of sophisticated fragrance that—with her furs thrown over a couch with a rich careless softness, her long gloves slightly wrinkled, the black gleam of her pointed slippers—suggested the autumnal briskness of the city streets outside.

These things stirred Marjorie with a sense of life. She was learning. The forlorn chill of her little bleak room upstairs was gone. Warmth crept through her uneasiness . . . but a glance at the street outside, at the cold sky, and she felt a sharp stab from those wounding thoughts of home —saw mamma lonely and frail in the huge dark station, saw papa turning to leave the station and going back to the store. . . .

Chapter III

I

NOW, on Monday morning, Marjorie was one of that hurried, chattering group of girls in the hall, pulling on gloves, turning over the letters on the table, taking flying glances at the mirror. The two days that mamma and Aunt Bessie had said she must have, for "getting straightened around," were gone. She was going to the Academy.

She waited, pretending to fasten her gloves, to be looking in her bag for her key. Marian and Wilda, the two girls who went to her own school, and to whom Miss Noble had introduced her, paid no attention. She stood in proud, lonely distress, too new and shy to speak to them unless they looked at her, smarting with sensitive humiliation. The handsome red-cheeked girl whom she had noticed at tea—Dorothy Stanley—came through the hall, stopping at the poorly lighted mirror to adjust her toque with its dashing pin of Oriental gold. She glanced at Marian and Wilda, then said curtly:

"Here, Powers and Fales, is another candidate for your school, isn't she? Why not all go along together?" she added pointedly, a slight knowing sarcasm in the twist of her lips.

She went off, easy and swinging, humming a little tune.

Relieved at not having to find her way alone through the unknown, terrifying streets—but humiliated, too—Marjorie followed silently with the two girls. At tea, they had sat in a corner of the davenport and spoken only to each other. Wilda, with her hostile eyes and heavy, sullenly closed

mouth, spoke only twice, and then to Marian. Shy, strange, resentful, Marjorie walked along with them, conscious of the loud sound of her own heels on the pavement. The sky was blue again. She had a vision, sharp, confused, of shops and churches. Little pale, slick-looking, Bostonian men with pointed shoes were all hurrying along carrying Boston bags.

She had been seeing the Academy of Expression as a kind of classic hall set in a dream. The girls went into a large building in which were lawyers' offices, studios of music and dancing, a few little special shops. They took the slightly unsteady elevator to the fourth floor. "Academy of Expression" was printed in gold lettering upon three doors. From the others came the discordant sound of pianos, of scales sung over and over again. Marjorie silently followed the other girls, instinctively keeping closer to Marian. She had expected nothing like this—the inner room where wraps were hung and where strange chattering girls were gathered. Marian led her through a long room, with a platform and mirrors, to an office, set off by folding doors, where she was to see Mrs. Courtwick.

The reality of the long-expected ordeal brought a superficial calm tinged with a trembling excitement. Other girls were waiting, some of them sitting silent and apart, some talking eagerly together. A clangour of traffic outside. The room was half office, half reception room, with a large desk, a leather couch.

These girls were all waiting to see Mrs. Courtwick. There was some legend of awful power about her. She was in the inner office, of which there were glimpses when the door was opened to let a girl in or out. The sympathetic manner of Mrs. Courtwick's assistant, her soft voice with its slightly Southern accent, lightened the sense of ordeal. The assistant had a broad chest, like a singer's, but small hands with tiny tapering fingers. Marjorie was impressed by the urban look of her chiffon blouse and skirt of wine-red broadcloth. Marjorie was not going to wear

this old hat from Miss Finch's a day longer than she had to. If she only had another hat—the kind that the girls were wearing here, of that thick soot-black velvet—soft and rich —she would not mind going in to Mrs. Courtwick so much.

Even through the tight nervous strain of waiting, she was aware of other girls in the room—sharply aware of some, only dimly of others. One loud deep voice, with Negro inflexions, kept breaking into the murmur, constrained but eager, pervading the room. There was a little Jewess, very young, with a heavy nose and large dark eyes, hanging black curls whose texture was like that of soft coal. She wore a green suit and bright pink blouse, a little black velvet hat—like a fez—with a gold tassel that danced wildly when she bounced in her chair.

"Whey you-all come from?" she demanded. She was telling everyone that she came from "Mizz'zippi"—"long ways from home! Suah wish Ah's back theah if they keep me a-waitin' much longuh!"

Some of the girls laughed, a few looked disdainful, at her irrepressible comments. In spite of her crudity, her Jewish flamboyance, her aggressiveness, her hanging curls, she was a relief in the room, an unwillingly accepted comedian.

"What she doin' to 'em in theah?" she demanded, laughing loudly. "Ah suah am scared when mah tahm comes!"

She leaned forward and poked the girl next to her, a pale neat school-teacher from Michigan, who gave a look both prim and frightened, and moved ostentatiously away.

"Ah guess that's Bluebeard's chambuh! Ah'm suah goin' to lose mah haid!"

There was one plump girl with elaborate clothes and a small hat with a black ribbon under her chin. Her fat pale face was like a face made of dough, with raisin eyes stuck in a little crooked. She went into the inner office, buoyantly smiling; but when she came out her little raisin eyes bulged; and although she had been so assured before that other girls had been eyeing her with hostility—making a

show of chattering and laughing with two others who were expensively dressed—she could not restrain herself from taking the room indiscriminately into her confidence.

"Oh, it was terrible! I was stricken! I stammuhed and stuttuhed——!"

Marjorie's heart sank with horror; and the last of her assurance, from being the star of the Tubbs Elocution Department, Mrs. Shrader's favourite pupil, reading at the Woman's Club . . . was gone. . . . And yet excitement kept stabbing through her nervousness . . . at the newness, hearing real Southern accents like the Little Colonel's, Eastern accents which had meant both culture and affectation in Buena Vista.

2

The assistant murmured: "Has Mrs. Courtwick seen you yet?" She took Marjorie's hand, with a confidential and reassuring sympathy, first asking her—in a murmuring whisper—for her name. "Oh, yes. Your mother wrote to Mrs. Courtwick. Have you a nice place to stay? . . . That's lovely."

But when they entered the inner office, the reassuring air which the assistant had worn in the room where she was the one in charge changed to a deferential, subdued, secretarial manner. She dropped Marjorie's hand. After waiting a moment, she said with a nervous softness: "Mrs. Courtwick!" She had to wait still while Mrs. Courtwick continued to look over her papers. She smiled at Marjorie, not in reassurance, but to apologize for her inability to force an interruption.

"Mrs. Courtwick!—unless you're busy."

Mrs. Courtwick raised her head, her gaze still on the letters, then took off a pair of gold-bowed, grandmotherly spectacles, and looked formidably at her assistant.

The assistant continued with self-protective softness: "This is one of the new students."

She replied in a low murmuring voice to Mrs. Courtwick's abrupt, unremembering questions. Every detail of the letter had to be recalled. Mrs. Courtwick flatly denied certain statements, while the assistant waited, with her pretty, painful smile. "Oh, yes! Well—very well." The assistant smiled again at Marjorie, and went out very softly.

Marjorie stood uncomfortably waiting, keeping down her amazement that her old vision of a Mrs. Courtwick in stately trailing gowns—like the picture of a reader of "Dramatic Selections" in the old *Speaker*—should resolve itself into this. She could see that the clothes, even the figure of the assistant, were founded upon Mrs. Courtwick's. Mrs. Courtwick was broad, solid, her chest was large and deep. But it was not protruding, like Mrs. Phillips' bosom, which, in its sheathing of dark silk, always had across it an abrupt line of light; nor like the huge aggressive chest of Mrs. Maria Gurney Perkins, the dictator of the Woman's Club in Wahseta. Mrs. Courtwick's hands were small at the ends of her large, firm, easily swinging arms. But her fingers did not taper in that delicate way, nervous and tiny. They were blunt; and in spite of the smallness and plumpness of these white hands, they held a terrifying implication of power. It was easy to see how the assistant's clothes had been patterned after Mrs. Courtwick's—the black broadcloth skirt, straight, rather short, the width of black chiffon laid flatly across her broad chest.

She turned from her letters, holding her quaintly incongruous spectacles. Her head had power, like the head of some animal—a lioness; round and heavy, the neck short. Her face had the flatness of contour of a lioness, with the thick nose, soft but powerful, the small eyes set wide apart. Her white hair was soft, plainly combed. Her face was too large to need a frame of hair. Her skin was fresh, firm-textured, almost pink and white. Her strength was in the turn of her head on her neck; her ruthlessness in the movements, abrupt but with the ease of some big feline, of her short thick arms and small hands; in the flat width of her

chest. . . . Mrs. Shrader, with her fragile bony arms and melancholy eyes, her floating draperies and her ear-rings, was now weak and somehow pathetic. Marjorie's trust in Mrs. Shrader was gone.

"Sit down."

Marjorie sat down, breathing quickly and shallowly, knowing at once that she could never carry out mamma's firm instructions to tell Mrs. Courtwick exactly what classes she wanted. The ways in which she had pictured this first meeting with Mrs. Courtwick—giving the scene from *The Servant in the House* that she had read at Mrs. Shrader's closing recital, silent admiring girls in the background, Mrs. Courtwick at once "recognizing" her . . . her favourite—were at once unreal and absurd. Now she was suddenly unsure of all her readings—the "child's piece" that she had given that morning at the Woman's Club, for which Mrs. Maria Gurney Perkins and Mrs. John Jewell Powell, the president, had praised her; even those "dialect pieces" that had always brought encores at the lodge meetings in Wahseta. She remembered the man with the walrus moustache, who had brought her coffee and Wiener bun sandwiches at the lodge, and begged wheezily: "Say, sister, can't you whistle for us again?" She had been proud and assured leaving the girls that morning at the station at home —they staying in Buena Vista, she going East to become a reader, go upon Chautauqua. . . . Now she was new, and uncertain, and small.

"What's your name?"

"Marjorie Schoessel."

"What?"

She repeated, with a feeling that her lips were stiff and thick: "Marjorie Schoessel." Her name sounded absurd and meaningless.

"Hm. Where's your letter? You ought to have written before you came."

"I did," Marjorie assured her anxiously. "My mother did."

"I don't find any letter. Well, you want the regular course. You can go into the first-year class. Buy your books in the office, from Miss Lee. We use Dr. Courtwick's books, you know. Can't use any of these things you've probably been studying—you know that," Mrs. Courtwick stated abruptly. She turned back to her letters.

"Oh, but——" Marjorie's eyes were distressed, she spoke with eager softness.

She was standing, confused, horrified; but even if Mrs. Courtwick was through with her, she couldn't go without saying something.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Courtwick looked up.

"But I was going to have a special course," Marjorie urged with soft, distressed eagerness.

"Special course? Why were you to have a special course?"

She knew, under that formidable gaze of Mrs. Courtwick's small brown eyes, how inadequate, how weak, were all the things mamma and Mrs. Shrader had marshalled so triumphantly—the contest and the work with Miss Cuddiford, the recital at Tubbs, her reading in Wahseta. It had sounded so imposing when mamma had written it—"Mrs. Pearle Waggoner Shrader, graduate of the Ella Bird Glauber School of Chicago, former member of the Harmony Four of the Burton Chautauqua, director of the Elocution Department, Tubbs College."

"Was this teacher one of our graduates?" Mrs. Courtwick demanded. And when Marjorie faintly mentioned the Ella Glauber School, she said with a robust contempt: "Oh, well——! If she wasn't one of our graduates——"

Now the year's work in the Tubbs Elocution Department, the special lessons with Mrs. Shrader, the graduate recital—even assisting Mrs. Shrader at her programs at the Woman's Club—were brushed contemptuously aside by Mrs. Courtwick.

"Oh, well, we can't give credit to every little school. You can't have a special course for that. You'll have to enter for the regular two-year course."

Marjorie stood at the door for a moment, her eyes smarting and her throat aching. She was only a beginner. But Mrs. Courtwick did not remember the letter she had written mamma, promising the special course—would not speak of it. And she was helpless, cheated, alone—it wasn't possible.

She urged faintly: "But you wrote——"

"What? Have you the letter there?"

"No, but——"

"Couldn't have written that you could have special training. Or you couldn't have made the matter clear in your letter. You'll have to enter for the regular course."

Marjorie stood there with a sinking feeling of horror, of that black gulf opening before her again. Of course she didn't have the letter—Mrs. Courtwick had *written* it, mamma had thought it was all settled. Now Mrs. Courtwick was putting down her name for the regular course. She was dismissed.

She went blindly into the inner office and gathered up her wraps. She could not pay her tuition before she had written to mamma and papa, no matter what Mrs. Courtwick had told her. Perhaps she had no right to stay here to-day. Papa and mamma had let her come East because they had thought she would need only one year of special training. Then she would be a reader. Tears of doubt and sensitive humiliation came miserably into her eyes as she fumbled for the chair where her coat lay. She did not want to tell anyone, did not want to be noticed—only to get away, to get back to her chilly little room at the Association, to her own cot. But as the assistant kept questioning her, leading her on into the other room with an arm about her, she told in a quavering voice that she tried desperately to keep steady: how Mrs. Courtwick had misunderstood her and had not remembered about the letter, how she could not pay her tuition and enter for the regular course. Other girls were looking at her curiously. She was too wretched to care.

The assistant, Miss Lee, listened with sympathetic distress—and yet with a reserve that Marjorie felt sensitively.

"You must bring the lettuh that you say Mrs. Courtwick wrote your mothuh," she urged gently. "Bring the lettuh, and then I know we can settle this."

"But I don't think mamma has it," Marjorie sobbed, dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief. "I don't think we kept it. We thought it was . . . all right."

A strange glint showed for just a moment in the assistant's eyes. Then she became reassuring. "You know, Mrs. Courtwick gets so many letters. Perhaps she didn't understand that your mothuh thought you were to have a special course."

"Oh, but I *know* she did. She wrote my mother."

"Well," Miss Lee said, with a kind of fervent helplessness, "we mustn't worry. I'm *suah* it will all come right. . . . No, no, you mustn't go home."

There was a comfort in the touch of her little delicate fingers, in the soft urgency of her voice. The letter would be found; and even if it was not, Marjorie's mother would be sure to want her to take the two-year course when it was all explained. She gently persuaded Marjorie to let her coat and hat be hung with the other wraps, to go into the front studio and "have her breathing tested." She need not pay her tuition until she heard from her parents. But everything would come right. Marjorie yielded to the appeal of her soft voice that slurred the sounds gently, her little fingers, her serious troubled grey eyes.

3

Marjorie's feeling of perilous strangeness was increased by the sight of the long room. Girls lay flat on the floor. Some of them looked at her with a strained upward gaze; others kept their eyes closed and breathed consciously. This was a "studio"—the big, romantic, dimly lighted room she had always seen, with antique bronzes scattered about, a fur rug thrown over a carved chair, and "artists." . . . There was a little platform, and a piano, a light polished

floor—a kind of compromise between concert room and drawing-room. The teacher went quietly from girl to girl; and her silent movements, her deep hushed murmurs, gave the place a tranced, mystic air. She was small, plainly dressed in brownish-green serge—a short-waisted figure, her face large for her body, high-coloured, with straight dry brown hair and large green-brown eyes. This was Mrs. Laurie . . . in the catalogue—"Rhythmic Gymnastics. Mrs. Laurie." . . .

She took Marjorie's hand in a small, thin, firmly closing palm. She said in a low, deep, dreamy voice: "Just breathe. Easily—easily. Feel the breath come and go. In the centre. Breathe."

Marjorie lay still, just as Mrs. Laurie had arranged her, with her arms flat, a hand just touching her skirt on each side. The room was trancedly quiet—made more so by the far-away rattle of traffic outside. A girl near her was breathing in long, determined inhalations and exhalations. The girl was short and stout, and lay with lips firmly closed and a look of desperate resolve, her eyes shut so tightly that the lids were wrinkled. She pushed her swelling diaphragm determinedly in and out, breathing hard against her corset laces. Other girls were quiet, as if they understood, and were in, this mysterious trance. Occasionally a foot or hand moved nervously.

Mrs. Laurie, moving softly about, knelt down beside one girl and then another, commanding in a low firm tone: "Breathe, breathe." Marjorie lay tense and amazed, waiting. She felt Mrs. Laurie coming. A little firm hand was slipped under her back, another placed lightly quivering on her waistband. She grew rigid with self-consciousness.

"Breathe—just breathe. Give up." The small quivering fingers moved lightly up and down with her breathing. She opened her eyes once and saw Mrs. Laurie's face, with the dry burning colour and the large eyes, motionless and listening about her. . . . "You have not found the centre."

. . . It was a mysterious and final judgment, confirming her whole sense of misery and failure.

4

She hoped desperately to find Marian and Wilda at noon. But they were gone. She stood back in the elevator while other girls talked excitedly together. She was solitary, from the West. She had not paid her tuition. No one spoke to her; and to keep her isolation from being conspicuous, she fumbled carefully with the fastening of her glove.

When she went out on the street, it all looked big, strange, confusing under that high, hard, blue sky. She had never been in a city before, except for that day in Chicago, and a trip to Des Moines. The streets branched off in so many directions. She started down one, then saw that it was not the street along which she had come with Marian and Wilda in the morning. For a terrible moment, she did not know how to get back to the school. When she found the right doors, she dared not go far from them, dared not try to go back to the Association for lunch. She turned into the first eating-place that she saw.

The dining-room was downstairs—a low room with tables laid with thin, cheap, ugly cloths and heavy vinegar cruets. There were men at a table near her, one of them heavy and black-browed—like a sailor, she thought. She took only a taste of the vegetable soup in its heavy bowl, then fled up the stairs and to the street.

She went up to the Academy again, and waited, sitting in the middle room, where a group of girls had gathered, with their Boston bags on the floor beside them, chattering in an alien speech with the *r*'s in the wrong places. She thought of the classes that had sounded so alluring in the catalogue, when she had studied it up in the tree-house last summer—"Practice of Dramatic Art," "Vocal Expression," "Study of Poetry." When Mrs. Laurie came through the room, she

blushed, conscious that she "had not found the centre." At last she realized that there would be no classes that day.

Miraculously, she found the way to 72 St. John Street. In her small room upstairs, with the door closed, she was free to give way at last to her misery. She was horrified by the sight of the roofs and the strange sky-line. She heard the girls going down to tea. But although she longed for the consolation of the living-room with the shining tea things and the books, she was too miserable to go. Girls in books always determined to stay and conquer. Yes, but they always did conquer, and everyone knew from the start that they would. This was different, this black pit of loneliness. Maybe things could actually go wrong, in spite of determining to conquer. She would have to write papa and mamma about the two-year course, making more expense, when she knew how worried papa was because the automobiles were taking the best furniture trade to Wahseta, when they had thought one year would "do" her.

It was better in the morning, though—the sky blue, the air crisp, a windless day. No one said anything about her tuition at the Academy. She sat through the strange classes, glad because she was not called upon, and yet conscious with deep shame that she did not have the centre. Now she knew that she could never give any of her old readings here. They were not right. She was getting accustomed to being inconspicuous. Every noon, every afternoon, when she went back to the Association she looked at the array of letters on the hall table with both a hope and a dread of seeing mamma's familiar slanting writing.

It was there. She took it and fled up to her room, shut the door. She sat down on her cot and breathlessly opened it. . . .

Mamma and papa had been much surprised at her letter. They could not understand how Mrs. Courtwick could have forgotten what she had promised. They had thought, with

all the fine training and experience that Marjorie had had, one year would be enough. They were afraid Mrs. Courtwick had taken advantage of her because she was a young girl. (Marjorie flushed rebelliously.) This would take more money than they had planned, and it was a little hard for papa just now. He had found that he must get rid of the old hearse and buy an auto hearse. But they had talked it over. They knew how talented their girl was, and they wanted her to have what she needed. She was not to think of coming home from Boston.

A sudden eager happiness surged through Marjorie. Now she could let through her enjoyment of the long rooms with the polished floors and that exciting, distant roar of traffic; of the little shops that she passed, where imported candies and nuts lay various and compact in foreign boxes under their icy glazing of transparent paper; of Trinity standing solid and apart, the outlines of its towers softened and blurred upon the blue sky. She could laugh at the big Scotch minister from Canada reading:

> **"Oh' larks, sing out to the thrush-uzz,**
> **And thrush-uzz, sing to the sky,**
> **Sing from your nests in the bush-uzz-zz——"**

in his solemn, slow voice, in Miss Redding's class.

She simply could not stay in her room. She dashed to the mirror, smoothed her hair, put on powder and her best blouse that gave her a feeling of festivity. All at once, the living-room was not strange to her. Dorothy Stanley and some other girls were lounging in gay idleness on the big davenport, and waiting for a sight of the good-looking young curate who lived in the parish house across the street.

"Hello, little one, why do thine eyes shine?" Dorothy drawled sweetly. "Art happy?"

"Oh, I should say!" Marjorie breathed eagerly. She burst out with her only communicable news. "Papa's getting a new auto hearse!"

The girls broke into helpless laughter. Dorothy embraced

Mary Clark and rolled weakly on the cushions. She gasped: "This *child!* Isn't she a joy?" She reached out and patted Marjorie's shoulder with her large firm hand. "Never mind, little one. You have brightened a dark day for us with this joyful news!"

Chapter IV

I

IT was no use to try to enjoy anything until she had bought her new hat—one which would have that richness and softness that belonged to Boston hats, to Dorothy Stanley's, and to that pretty black-eyed Southern girl's who talked like the Little Colonel. Marjorie went timidly down to the office to speak to Miss Coleman. She had made one or two discreet expeditions into the shopping district with Edith Robinson; but Edith did not think it "nice" to stop and look into windows. It was so rich and strange and crowded, she had not dared to go alone.

"Miss Noble, where would be the best place for our little new member to look for a hat?" Miss Coleman asked affably.

Miss Noble said in her cold, biting voice, with its hint of obscure sarcasm: "Dorothy and Molly May are going shopping this afternoon—as usual. She might go with them." In spite of her stiff shirtwaist and tweed skirt, there was something coldly and correctly ecclesiastical about Miss Noble.

Although she was a leader at home, Marjorie felt small and immature beside girls like these, who took possession of the living-room at night and danced so easily in and out of the firelight. Dorothy was large, dashing, in street clothes, with a suggestion of opulence. Molly May had a white plumpness, a bright dark glint of eyes through lashes that were prettily soft and thick, like fur. She leaned on Dorothy's arm as they crossed the Gardens, and plaintively talked to her with a cool disregard for Marjorie; but Dorothy

sometimes gave Marjorie's arm a casual remembering squeeze with her large strong hand in its fashionable heavy glove. Dorothy was wearing a chrysanthemum.

The crowd along Tremont Street was leisurely. The air was crisp and autumnal, making the fall suits in the shop windows—at all of which Molly May had to stop and look—more enticing with their fur and dark rich winter colours.

Marjorie went along silently, carefully in step with the other girls. But her eyes were bright with an awareness, half painful, half eager, of the people and the shops and the windows. The antique shops, the brass andirons that made her think of the stories of the Pilgrims on which her childhood had been fed; the old candlesticks of thick blue English ware; the mix-up of things in the windows that had the rich, fascinating intricacy of the pictures of the Old Curiosity Shop in the Dickens book at home. Florentine shops—the Madonna pictures in Italian colours of thick dark blue and red, the carved frames of dull smooth brown . . . evening dresses of taffeta in frosty rose, or pale clear green with a silvery cast that made her think of the inside of a May-apple . . . silks, jewellery, pastry with crusty white roses on pink icing . . . If she only had her new hat, so that she could be part of this—of the crowd moving so easily; not alien and distrustful, so that she wanted to shun those dimly shining glimpses of herself in the shop windows where they had to stop with Molly May.

They went to the Oriental store, where Molly May was looking for "somethin' to give mah cousin Susie Washin'ton." It was thrillingly strange and enchanting to Marjorie—the thin, stinging odour of incense, boxes with crinkled Japanesy paper and red and green tassels. A little low-voiced, slant-eyed Jap went softly about and silently held out first one thing and then another. Marjorie stealthily tried to find the price of a cake of sandalwood soap, in a wrapper of thin red-and-gold paper, like a package of firecrackers. Sandalwood . . . the brown carved fan that Mrs. Phillips had brought her from California, and that she had kept in a fold

of her china silk dress . . . Molly May lingered over this and that.

"Stanley, which would you choose? Naow, tell me."

"I have told you. This—this—or this. All good-looking."

"But sure 'nuff, would Susie like this?"

"Never having seen Susie, I cannot speak with that degree of certainty which you seem to demand, Miss Lynn. But if I were Susie, I should accept with pleasure. . . . Oh, hurry up, Lynn. Here, you're taking this. Don't you know this child wants to buy a hat, with our august advice?"

As they left the Oriental store, "I've found a new hat shop," she announced briefly. "The Bigelow child bought a hat there, said to be good-looking."

The little hat shop, high up in a building, seemed forbiddingly urban to Marjorie, with its few hats carefully and "artistically" displayed instead of having whole tables covered, as in the hat departments in Wahseta. A woman with tinted hair and a manner of carefully concealed eagerness came toward them. Before she could reach them, Dorothy abruptly walked out of the shop. The others scurried after. Marjorie's cheeks were flushed hotly. She felt mingled shame and admiration at Dorothy's cool arrogance.

"Down!" Dorothy called imperiously. The elevator, which had gone past their floor, returned. Dorothy drew the others in after her. "Frightful!" she said. "Didn't like the place. We shall make no more expeditions into the unknown."

"Well, Stanley, the way you *ran* out of theah!" Molly May protested.

"That was a masterly retreat. Did you see the woman's hair? I was made responsible by Mother Coleman for seeing that this child is furnished with a hat."

Molly May seemed all at once to become aware of Marjorie. She gave her a long bright stare through her thick furry lashes. Then she began to beg Marjorie to try on one hat after another.

"Don't you-all think this is a pretty hat?"

"Stunning. Not for her, though. Too big."

"Would Ah look well in this, Stanley?"

"Lynn, for God's sake don't begin trying on hats."

"Ah know it, but Ah just cain't resist it."

Molly May sighed. When they passed blouses, she had to look at those. She disappeared once, to Dorothy's vociferous amazement; and then came suddenly hurrying out of a fitting-booth, where she had been trying on an evening dress that she considered as deeply as if there had been a possibility of her buying it. On their way about the shops, she helplessly acquired a pair of green stockings, a sport handkerchief, and a veil.

"Lynn, I thought you were on the rocks."

"Ah know it, don't tell me abaout it. Ah just couldn't pass these things."

Dorothy took entire charge of Marjorie's purchase. She vetoed with scorn the little odd "cunnin' " things that Molly May was always lighting upon.

"She can't wear that. You're mad, Lynn. We're not buying this for you."

Marjorie could find no way of saying that she "could not pay too much"—it filled her with disturbing shame before the girls' airy assumption that she wanted whatever became her best. The limits that mamma had set—thinking them imposingly generous—burned in her mind. Among the carpets and shining mirrors that had such a perilous fascination, she could not buy a cheaper hat. The softly respectful air of the tall saleswoman, who drew on the silken-lined hats so carefully over her delicately ruffled hair, forbade it. There was one hat that the girls pronounced "perfectly adorable." She was flattered by their approval, confused by the opulence of the shop, secretly enchanted by the strangely pleasing vision in the long mirror. She ordered the hat to be sent to 72 St. John Street, heard herself giving the address with a mixture of amazed horror and exultation.

As they went out on the street again, to "seek tea," the

knowledge that the hat had cost eleven dollars more than the limit mamma had set disturbed her excited satisfaction. It kept gnawing through her joy in the crispness of the air, the bare trees in the Gardens, the thought that now she could be one of this leisurely Bostonian crowd . . . shopping and drinking tea and going to Huyler's after the matinée; stopping in for thin sweetish chocolate in tall glasses at one of those Boston drug stores covered with coloured signs, that made her think of the jackstraw houses she used to build for Bud on Sunday afternoons; knowing which sign to watch in the subway . . . The possession of the hat made her at home in the little tea-room that faced the Gardens, among the well-dressed women who slipped off their soft wraps with certainty that the linings were good.

She was alarmed at the price of tea and sandwiches, but she did not want to take less than the other girls ordered. Her eyes grew bright with the sense of exciting new companionship with Dorothy and Molly May. She felt the fascination of their Boston—dances, shopping, Harvard men, the Touraine and the Plaza; sleeping through breakfast and then going at ten o'clock to that little confectioner's for sweet rolls and coffee. Dorothy was studying Interior Decorating with Lydia Sweeting Jones. She had designed—and sold—door-stops, black cats with dashing bows of ribbon. The girls spoke with awe of her ability. But she always had time for tea, for lounging on the cot in Molly May's room and shrieking over her stories of Georgia. "My *deah!* Not really? Why, how simply weird!" . . . Molly May had no other claims on her time than her half-hour's practice with the guitar—so that she could be qualified to live in the Students' Association. All the other girls were working—studying at schools of physical training and physical culture, at the Kate Winslow Tucker School of Dramatic Art, and the Wilbur Putnam Cheney School of Music. The Boston of Edith Robinson and that thin girl who was studying to be a deaconess, was different—school, and putting bureau drawers in order, being relied upon by Miss Coleman and Miss

Noble, going to afternoon concerts when the patronesses sent tickets. That of Wilda and Marian was more dingy still. Being silent when any of the other girls came into the living-room; Marian going into the bathroom to fill the hot water bag for Wilda; stuffing paper under the door and into the keyhole so that no one else could see the light under their door and smell the chocolate cake when they got a box from home. . . . But none of these was quite the Boston that Marjorie wanted. She could never go blithely beyond her allowance and make debts, and then write to papa when she had got in too deep, the way that Molly May did.

The hat came in a gay round box, such as she had seen only in advertisements and magazine illustrations before. Dorothy called out: "Come in and see the dahling hat that this child has bought!" And the other girls came flocking in, approving both the hat and her. "Oh, lovely!" They lifted it softly out of the tissue paper. "Wonder if I could wear this! Mind if I just try?" The hat had that thick, sooty-black look of the velvet that she craved.

She sat down on her cot in the few minutes before the dinner gong rang, and tried to figure out her finances on the back of a letter from Aunt Bessie. When the dreadful hour in the afternoon came when she simply could not stand it without something to eat, she would make her hunger be satisfied with the lemon-flavoured tea and two wafers that cost her nothing at the Association. She *had* to have this hat . . . to belong to the crowd on Washington, the students who filled Huyler's after matinées, the sight of women in fur coats and violets stepping into limousines. . . . To belong to the Association . . . the patroness hurrying in with the bright eyes of a Pekinese shining crossly above the rich fur of her muff; Miss Coleman's cap, of sheer, coarsely woven white organdie, starched to a fine and brittle stiffness; the hymn-singing that preceded breakfast, the girls standing in a semicircle in the living-room—not tiresome, because they were Episcopalian hymns from little black hymn-books with purple markers; the tea at half past four—the sounds

of singing, playing, declaiming, stopping all over the house, the scurry for the bathrooms, the dark chilly hall into which the girls came hurrying from their schools, carrying their Boston bags, their faces fresh and cold from the outside air.

2

Papa and mamma wanted to know all about the Academy. They were impatient because she wrote home little scrappy, unsatisfactory letters. It was all so different from her study with Mrs. Shrader, where she had worked on one "piece" after another. She told them that there was a nun in her class, and that Dr. Courtwick had known Oliver Wendell Holmes, that he had a silvery beard and a wide-brimmed hat and looked like Whittier. But she did not know how to communicate to them her sense of the fineness, the incongruities, the absurdities and irritations that made up the Academy of Expression.

She could not tell them how the discrepancies between the ideals of the school and its financial practices were gradually recognized by all except the abject worshippers among the students, and treated with flippancy, anger, laughter, cynicism, and the heart-rending disillusion of youth. About the strange confusion of classes and courses; how teachers had to lead their flocks from room to room and finally halt them in a corner among the wraps and Boston bags; and how, just because of this haphazardness, there was a homelike quality about the big studios, where the girls danced between classes, and stationed scouts to be on the watch for Mrs. Courtwick while they played with toy balloons. How the class in "English Composition and Literary Study," that had sounded so wonderful in the catalogue, was taught (when held at all) by Miss Caroline Lee, the assistant in the wine-coloured suit, who said that the compositions were "lovely," and tried fearfully to ward off questions about punctuation and spelling. How Dr. Courtwick shook with anger at their timid voices when he made them all expand their chests and shout

"Joy! Joy!" in the morning. How Mrs. Laurie had burst into tears when that boy in the first-year class had read from *The Idylls of the King*. And how Mrs. Wales had said that the ideals of Dr. Courtwick could not be of use without Mrs. Courtwick who got the money.

And then there were all the things that she liked, but that were no good in the telling. When the work fell through—or when Mrs. Courtwick was using their classroom—the first-year girls gathered around Mrs. Wales, who gave them motherly advice about shopping, dancing, social requirements; told them stories of her former triumphs on the platform, how a "gentleman in the audience" sent up to her a basket with a hundred roses. Mrs. Wales wore with a certain splendour her ear-rings and jet beads. She was short and stout, with a great protrusion of bosom (which she thumped proudly, and called her "expansion"), and tiny, daintily slippered feet. Special students came in from the outlying districts of Boston—stammerers and stutterers, clerks trying to improve their salesmanship, subnormal girls from wealthy families; a Monday class of young priests at whom the girls peeped and giggled when they were performing, with an ardent seriousness or a solemn pomposity, the exercise for "the free action of the limbs" under the vigorous direction of Mrs. Wales. Pilgrims from far places had been drawn to the Academy as to a Mecca by the writings of Dr. Courtwick defending "Expression" against "Elocution." The ex-chiropractor, Dr. Nina Woolley Peters, who had taken up one faith after dropping another. The young ministerial couple from "Tinnissee"—Baptists—who were taking a year of study in oratory before embarking for Africa as missionaries. The little Jewess from "Mizz'zippi," Miss Rachoffsky, thundering, as Lady Macbeth:

"Bay-uh MIN chil-drr-ren only . . ."

while her black eyes flashed.

Southern girls, from little boarding-schools and "female colleges," took a year or two of training at the Academy and

went back as "readers" or teachers. Marjorie had thought that there must be some mysterious, romantic superiority in "real Southerners"—something connected with Southern speech, and the sound of banjo strains, and smell of jasmine in the moonlight. Even the homely Southern girls—thin, sallow, with an inherent languor—had a soft, over-feminized "charm." They were pale, soft-skinned, communicative but clannish, with social ease and yet a rabid provincialism. Beside them, the Eastern girls were alert, sharp, vigorous, a little hard, a little cold, but yielding a dependable satisfaction; with their neat speech, neat garments. They rode in on the morning trains from Concord, Lexington, Lynn, Swampscott, and came hurrying from the subway together, carrying their Boston bags.

The Western girls received the sharpest criticism. Their voices were thinner and shriller. Several of them had borrowed money for this year of special training, and they meant business. They were almost too eager to sense and absorb a new atmosphere, like American tourists in Europe. They began calling the drug store the "apothecary" with conscious pleasure. But at times, a tribal feeling drew them suddenly together, in the cloakroom, or in a corner of the studio. "Come here, young woman! You belong in this crowd." Then they would share, with excited relief and pleasure, their common agony over the lack of system, their perception of the queer ways of these Easterners who scorned "ant" for "aunt," but said "Rosalind and Celiar." The speech of the school was a strange confusion of dialects. But there was something free and exhilarating in this, in the mingling of youth and middle age on equal terms. Marjorie took a romantic pleasure in writing Jessie: "One of my best friends here is a nun."

What she could tell no one at all was the gradual perception that all of her old readings were wrong. She blushed now when she thought of Mrs. Shrader at the Woman's Club chanting *The Rubaiyat* to music. In spite of all the dissatisfactions and incongruities, there was something different

here, something that she had dimly sensed, and wanted, when she had sat up in the tree-house with Buster murmuring over *High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire*. Mrs. Courtwick was getting old. Her voice, at times, was only a husky, strained breath. But the lines that she read stood out, clear and definite, like the music that Miss Davison had played. . . . That was why she must stay at the Academy, in spite of everything—to find and grasp that beautiful, secret, hidden thing for herself.

3

Aunt Bessie sent a list of "historical spots" that she wanted Marjorie to see. She wrote a letter of generous, wistful enthusiasm.

"It has been the dream of my life to some day visit the East and see for myself all these wonderful things I have read of, but things have not worked out that way, and now my little niece must see them for me."

Grandma Blossom was very feeble this winter. Mamma wrote that Aunt Bessie could not get out at all.

But the girls at the Association thought it "weird" that she should want to see Faneuil Hall. "Oh, my child, that's in a dreadful quarter! A small infant like you would most certainly be kidnapped." Dorothy shrieked: "My dear, that's what those dreadful school teachers do who come to *Bost*ing in the summer and tramp around looking things up in pamphlets and blinking their eyes. Put on your cunnin' new hat and come with us to see blouses at Chandler's. That's far more educational for you, little one."

Yes, but there were no "historical spots" in Iowa. Nothing but the first frame house in Buena Vista County that stood out on the river road. Mamma thought seeing churches and burying-grounds was part of the "opportunities" which they were making sacrifices to give her. She went alone to see Paul Revere's grave, and those queer little graves in the Common that looked like oven doors. Louisa

May Alcott had a little brother buried there—that was something to write Aunt Bessie. But most of her feeling of Boston she had to get from the old churches where she went with the girls on Sunday mornings.

Her hat and furs and shining dress shoes had a glamour when she put them on before church, shook out her best Christmas-gift handkerchief, and stopped to dab a little toilet water (from the Oriental store) on her eyebrows. Dorothy Stanley would always go with her to the Church of the Advent. The High Church mingling of dash and conscious religious exaltation, the spicy haze of incense from swinging censers, the dramatic pleasure of "going through the forms," intrigued and satisfied Dorothy. There was another little High Church place in a steep colonial street near the Capitol. But here there was a monastic hardness in the worn prayer benches, a monkish odour of poverty and age tinged with incense and the waxy scent of candles. After the familiar varnished atmosphere of the Buena Vista church, with one of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's plants on the small stand beside the pulpit, and Mr. Williamson hurrying down the aisle after the sermon so that no one could say he had neglected to shake hands . . . this was deeply romantic to Marjorie—like "being in a book," she wrote Aunt Bessie.

She liked the wealthy softness of the dark-red upholstery, comfortably faded, in Trinity, where Aunt Bessie had asked her to go because of Phillips Brooks. The processional, in which she grew to know the old men with silvery hair, the portly youngish men, carrying banners; the lifted faces and odd, straight chopped-off frocks of the choir boys; the white and gold and black, with its Episcopalian commingling of well-fed comfort and stability and of that pure, clear, cool soprano note, so sweet and unawakened, as if it came from a world of early morning.

Rejoice, ye-e pure in heart!
Rejoice, gi-ive thanks and sing!

Miss Coleman let her go with "a group" to the Old North,

because it was the bishop's church, although not in a nice district. Marjorie looked with awe at the steeple where Paul Revere had hung his lantern. She had firmly believed through her childhood that the great figures of American history were Paul Revere and John Alden and Priscilla; and had once held an argument with Grandpa Blossom—who liked to tease—affirming hotly that Paul Revere had done more for his country than George Washington. She liked the whiteness, bleakness and wintry coldness; the queer little pulpit perched so high. It was like being in a book again to see the name-plate on the pew: "For the Gentlemen of the Crew of the *Honduras.*" She thought of the little delicate drawings of Kate Greenaway girls with big velvet hats and muffs and ribboned slippers; of foot-warmers, and white colonial cupboards with diamond-shaped panes of glass; of the Gentlemen of the Crew of the *Honduras,* filing in with cocked hats under their arms, among them a sailorman from the West Indies with ear-rings and a red bandanna around his head. She had such a delicious, cosy feeling when the tiny door of the square, white-painted pew was closed, a secret joy in kneeling on the red hassock in the corner. It was like being in a little playhouse.

She liked the winter to be bitter and bleak. It was like stories of the Pilgrims. A box came from home in which there were two pink flannel nightgowns that Aunt Bessie had made extra long so that she could tuck up her feet, and two expensive suits of silk-and-wool underwear. But she had long ago determined that when she went away from home, she would never wear long underwear or overshoes again. She left on her scarlet cot cover at night, and stuffed cushions against the cold smooth wall from which an ancient, frosty breath exhaled. The air coming in from her north window made her think of the ocean—a cold, wintry, Homer Winslow ocean, where spray froze in the beards of the fishermen and the icy water that plashed on the deck of the sloping fishing-vessel closed around their heavy boots.

The girls could not understand why she was so anxious to see the ocean and a lighthouse.

Dorothy laughed and teased her. "Well, little Iowan, how have you improved yourself this week?" She pinched Marjorie's ear and called her "a weird child" because Marjorie begged her earnestly to go to hear Paderewski. "We ought to go, oughtn't we, Lynn? But, my beloved little one, does it mean nothing to you that Dottie has already overdrawn her allowance a mere twenty dollars and Lynn's family are about to descend in wrath from Georgia?" They called her "an extravagant but highbrow child." It was impossible to think that people would not go, when they actually had the chance, to hear Paderewski. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips had gone to Chicago to hear Schumann-Heinck. Dorothy and Molly May went every week to Keith's. They "adored" Maude Adams and were "simply mad over" William Gillette. Squads of the girls attended concerts, when the patronesses sent tickets. Edith Robinson said the right things about the music. But it was different—what she really wanted: the beautiful, aching, almost painful sense of unfoldment that came when she heard the Symphony play the *Unfinished Symphony*.

Marjorie went unescorted, at night, to see Pavlowa dance —much against the better judgment of Miss Coleman and Miss Noble, who only permitted it because she had spent her money for the ticket. Now she could not go to a teashop for three weeks—not even into the tiny, beloved one down the flight of white stairs, where there were little gilt chairs, and white settles, and cakes in rose-coloured baskets.

She felt a little dizzy as she looked down the steep aisles of the second balcony. Those little figures so far below her . . . It was *The Magic Flute*. There was the return of that same delicate delight as she grew to see the fine, clear, Mozartian precision of those tiny, far-off, dancing figures, of the little feet crossing and pointing. An *Idyll*, danced by two fairy things in pink, was hers, her very own. But

The Swan was most beautiful of all. She went home, her steps ringing on the cold stone, scarcely afraid of the black alleyways. The little slender form still dancing in wintry light, sinking, lying motionless, in a cold glamour of bluish silver . . .

Perhaps dancing was what she wanted. She thought feverishly that she must decide that very night. She would write papa and mamma that she must change and study dancing . . . be one of those fairy things in pink, with their movements of rose petals drifting . . .

It was fun to lounge about on cots, let her practising go, spend all her money in tea rooms. But she had a secret life that none of these things satisfied. Her own self came back to her when she was alone in her room, curled up on a cot reading a book from the living-room shelves. She knew all about this little room now—how long it took to get warm in the mornings, just when a bar of precious sunlight came into it. The view of Bostonian roofs from the window had a special meaning that she could share with no one. How well she knew the cushions ranged neatly on her cot—the little limp, slippery one of net over silvery milkweed floss with brown seeds that she and Aunt Bessie had gathered out on a hill near Shell Rock one bright autumn morning . . . Sharp, unexpected memories pained her—the dusty familiarity of the store; the easy middle-western wideness of the streets with their big trees, a team coming in from the country. . . . Because of Buster, she spoke softly to dogs that she met on the street. They halted sometimes, and raised mournful questioning eyes—then trotted on.

4

For the first day after the girls had left at Christmas time, there was a dreadful silence at 72 St. John Street. Most of all, she missed the large vital presence of Dorothy, coming singing up the stairs, banging open bureau drawers, keeping everyone else out of the bathroom.

But later Marjorie began to feel a special holiday cosiness in the house. A new intimacy developed among the girls left there—Molly May Lynn, Mary Clark, the girl who was studying at the Kate Winslow Tucker School, and Marjorie. They sat with Miss Coleman and Miss Noble at Miss Coleman's corner table in the dining-room. The cook made them special holiday dishes. They lounged in the living-room, where the fire was lighted every afternoon in the old-fashioned grate. Miss Noble actually brought in a box of candied orange peel from her sacred desk drawer. Molly May's eyes grew enormous when she saw it, and she took a small piece with limp fingers. They sat close to the fire, dreamily watched the changing flames, dipped into their boxes of candy from home.

Molly May was telling how the Negroes said "Christmas Gif'" in Georgia. Marjorie listened drowsily, hearing Molly May's droll, delicious speech, and at the same time living in Christmas at home . . . Christmas Eve, and the exercises at the church, her class of girls—Miss Orvis' class—singing in the Christmas choir and passing the bags of pink mosquito netting all knobby with hard Christmas candy from the big barrels that Patterson's got in. Meeting the girls at the post office on Christmas morning when the mail was distributed at ten o'clock. Would anyone remember to hang up a stocking for Buster and put a sack of candy in it? . . . Up in her room, hastily wrapping up presents for the family; the last look from her window as she raised it and pulled up the shade—the dark night behind the strong black branches of her maple on which the snow lay in feathery ridges . . .

But this was Christmas, too—more so, in a way, than her own had been.

Her box from home had come. The expressman was tramping off snow on the rug the maid brought, shouldering the box and carrying it up to her room while she flew up the stairs to open the door.

It was one of those big boxes of corrugated cardboard

from the store. Hummer had helped to get it ready for the mails—the twine was tied with his special knots. Mamma had had Bud take it down to the store when it was all packed and get it ready for mailing there. The sight and touch of the brown cardboard gave her the feeling of the store at Christmas time, with people from the country coming in to look at children's rocking-chairs, their big overshoes leaving dark drops of melting snow on the dusty floor. . . . And her darling old Bud had put in a box of chocolate peppermints from Buster. On the shiny white bottom of the box he had traced around Buster's paw and written:

Buster Schoessel. His Mark.

She saw and felt it all so vividly . . . and yet through a dreamy sense of distance.

She ran down into the living-room with the box of Aunt Bessie's fruit squares, made after the recipe famous in Shell Rock as "Bessie Blossom's squares." The hall was cold, a frosty breath came in around the edges of the heavy old door. Marjorie scampered through the hall. The thin hot scent of tea was already in the living-room. The stiff fragile whiteness of Miss Coleman's cap had a chill purity on this wintry day, when small snowflakes were sprinkled like tiny stars over the frozen black earth of the Common.

She gathered eagerly, as she sat drinking her tea and talking with the girls, the things that gave the special feeling to a Boston Christmas. White candles were in it, and the clear sound of Christmas music; the frosty streets, and the little temporary shops where cards and holly wreaths were sold, where Christmas trees with rough, brown, tangy bark leaned outside, set on trampled melting snow and dripping stiff needles.

They went out in the evening to hear the carols on Beacon Hill. The sky was high and black, with a sharp glint of stars. The ocean was lying close—huge, black and cold, with icy spray.

"I feel as if I'd just come off a ship!" Marjorie called back excitedly.

They climbed steep narrow streets. Rows of white candles stood motionless, significant, on the broad window-sills; cold, but with a pure softness in the white-gold flames. Holly wreaths on white doors.

The girls stood silent, close to each other, yet each remote in her own thoughts, when they heard the carols. "Noel, Noel" . . . swelling close, dying out over the hill. Carols, that belonged to little fine-drawn pictures of English waifs in torn shoes and big mufflers, outside a latticed window, on a Christmas card. There were little commonplace things, as always—running to catch up with Miss Noble, wailing over cold toes, not knowing which corner to turn. And yet, afterwards, the whole night was set apart, rayed with silver light in the blackness; and the frosty, coolly joyous, soprano lilt of the carols was ringing.

Chapter V

I

MRS. LAURIE said that Dr. Courtwick was the prophet, but that Mrs. Courtwick was the teacher and critic.

Marjorie had long ago given up her old dream of being "recognized" by Mrs. Courtwick. Now her only desire was to sit insignificant and unnoticed in Mrs. Courtwick's classes, behind the fat missionary from Tennessee. She woke up at night sometimes cold with the fear of Mrs. Courtwick's criticism.

She could never forget the terrible lesson in which the girl with the raisin eyes figured. This girl had been studying at a boarding-school in Virginia. She lived at a fashionable apartment house and carefully associated only with girls who dressed well and seemed to have good social connexions or acquaintance with desirable men. Even Mrs. Courtwick could not dash her ebullient self-possession. She had come to the class visibly pleased with herself and her preparation, with the splendour of her new velvet skirt and filmy blouse. The others sat in mute terror of being noticed, but she eagerly volunteered to read. She walked smilingly to the front of the room, bowed to Mrs. Courtwick, bowed to the class, and in an affected throaty voice began, with joyous self-confidence:

"Hahk! Hahk! The lahk
At heaven's gate sings . . ."

Mrs. Courtwick stopped her. While the girl stood in her splendour, still smiling but a little uncertain, in the tense silence that followed . . . Mrs. Courtwick stared

straight ahead without expression, and then deliberately, masterfully mimicked, in absurd falsetto:

"Hahk! Hahk! The *lahk!*"

An uneasy titter was quickly stifled at a warning, terrified glance from Miss Redding. The girl's smile was frozen painfully upon her little, full, pursed button mouth as she still stood there not moving, in her dreadful conspicuousness. Mrs. Courtwick turned upon her savagely, with one sudden, powerful movement.

" 'The lahk'! What is 'the lahk' to get such a greeting? Where did you get that voice? What makes you so pleased with yourself? Look at you. Come prancing up here and sing to the lahk! Look at that skirt. Why do you get up here in a skirt like that? Very much pleased with it, aren't you? Came up here to show it off. A skirt so tight it shows your very buttocks."

In the terrible silence, the girls looked down, uneasily moved their hands, breathed with difficulty. The Virginia girl stood, her lips still set in the grimace of a smile; but over her little tilted raisin eyes, there had come a bright film of tears.

"That'll do. You've had enough and so have we. When you get home to-night, cut that skirt to pieces and make doll dresses for some poor child. The next time you go shopping, take someone with you who has taste. Mrs. Wales, you'll see to that."

After the class, the girls clustered talking in horrified undertones.

"Where is she now?"

"In the room with Mrs. Wales."

"Oh, Ah'd simply dah, Ah'd kill mahse'f, honey, if anybody evuh did me like that!"

Even those who had disliked the girl and resented her silly arrogance, could feél no joy when she came out of the classroom, her head down, body shrinking in humiliation, and, with her new coloured handkerchief at her eyes, rushed

blindly to the cloakroom. They turned their eyes away so that they need not see the pitiful foolishness of her shamed body in its silly adornment—the fur-trimmed coat of ultra cut, the little hat with the black ribbon, the melon-shaped muff.

A rigidity went through the classes when Mrs. Courtwick came out from the office, walking straight ahead with her heavy step, her short arms swinging, her small brown eyes taking in the room in one quick, formidable glance. She entered classes at her own pleasure, ruthlessly stopping the lesson in mid-air. When she taught—infrequently, compared with the statements in the catalogue—she was attended like royalty by one of her teachers. This teacher—even Mrs. Wales, with her large bosom and waved grey hair—was sent ignominiously for books or for Mrs. Courtwick's spectacles, and scolded roundly if she appeared without them. No apology was made when the very articles were discovered later upon Mrs. Courtwick's desk. At one time, poor Miss Redding was sent scurrying about for a note-book which both she and the girls saw in Mrs. Courtwick's own lap. It was a scene of complete absurdity—Miss Redding distressed and fluttering, the girls all trying to tell Mrs. Courtwick and she frowning down their every attempt until they sat scared and silent with all their eyes fastened in an agonized stare upon that very book. But although at first they might sit exasperated and rebellious, hating Mrs. Courtwick, gradually they began to respond to the force of her teaching, to rise to it with a kind of excitement.

But her method of rule was dangerous. A little loss of strength, and there would be mutiny. The classes were helter-skelter. An edict would suddenly issue from the office that nothing was to be done until Mrs. Courtwick should appear; and she would not appear. Or she would suddenly call a teacher from her class and keep her at some little tedious routine work in the office, while the girls sat fuming, the boldest ones leaving, the conscientious or fearful ones

sitting the hour through. How they all detested that girl from Lawrence who always made dutiful use of these occasions to go through her exercises! The other girls danced, burlesqued the free action of the limbs, drew pictures on the little blackboard. . . . Suddenly one couple stopped, with a shamed, nervous, flustered defiance—then another . . . Mrs. Courtwick stood—short, powerful, silent—in the doorway.

"Dancing! Nothing to do; no work; no need for practice. Here, spending your parents' money so that you can learn something—the teacher leaves you one moment, and you begin dancing. No evidence of brains, no power of meeting a situation. In this class of thirty young women ["Twenty-eight," a rebellious whisper said] there is not a single girl capable of leadership and of turning this time into account. That's what earnestness of purpose means."

The dancers stood with downcast eyes under the terrible strength of the attack, under their nameless fear of that short powerful figure in the doorway. But beneath their surface shame, burned an angry sense of all the purposeless hours, the broken assignments, teachers called away. One girl's lips curled in hysteric, ironic amusement. A few stared straight at Mrs. Courtwick in mute defiance. But they dared not reply to her. Only that thin, red-haired girl from Colorado—Emily Reever—spoke. Her hands shook slightly.

"We were working." Her voice sounded foolishly strained and immature after Mrs. Courtwick's curt, husky tones. She went on, her lips trembling: "We were getting a lot out of Mrs. Laurie's class. She's been called out of class three times in the last two weeks, and the work we were doing just dropped."

"What's that?"

In the terrifying moment that followed, Mrs. Courtwick simply stood, steadily and intently eyeing Emily Reever. Then she stepped back into the office and the folding doors were closed.

A long sigh of relief. Murmurs of "Whew!" Some of the girls began to clap their hands, noiselessly but joyously. There was a dangerous, hilarious excitement abroad in the room. Who would ever have thought that that quiet Emily Reever would defy Mrs. Courtwick to her face! Emily, after standing a moment, her hazel eyes very fiery, suddenly walked into the cloakroom, got her wraps and left the building. Mrs. Laurie returned to her class. But Emily's absence was not mentioned.

There was eager conjecture as to how Mrs. Courtwick would treat Emily Reever. A week or two later, in class, Mrs. Courtwick—who had ignored the girl before, except for an abrupt order to Mrs. Wales never to let her take up class time again until she'd got rid of that Western twang—called upon Emily to read *The Ode to Mount Blanc at Sunrise.* She listened intently through the whole reading, the fixed expression of her watching face never changing even when Emily's voice broke once under the strain. She spent the whole hour upon that one reading; and although she gave a grilling criticism, she ended with the abrupt announcement to the class:

"One thing she starts with, however, in which the remainder of this class is singularly lacking. A brain.

"That will do. Very well read."

But what Mrs. Courtwick said was final. There was in these fearful criticisms—when they did not wither—a tonic quality. The girls might rebel, explain, declare the criticism unjustified, try to get around it. But this only made the girls absurd. Marjorie was sick with dread of speaking before Mrs. Courtwick. But she secretly longed for it. It was a test of fire, like going into battle.

Only now she no longer dreamed of reading her recital "piece," of hearing Mrs. Courtwick say: "This girl has wonderful talent. She will go far." One little word of commendation would be enough—too much to really hope for. When the class read Mother Goose rhymes, Marjorie sat with hot cheeks, hoping and dreading both that Mrs.

Courtwick would call on her for *Mistress Mary,* the one to which she always used to turn when Aunt Bessie was showing the Mother Goose book to her and Rich. Even yet it had not lost its old enchantment—the picture of a garden packed with bright fresh flowers, with a little row of white shells edging the damp soil like those in an old yard in Shell Rock, with girls in Greenaway dresses and ankle ties all ringing silver bells.

Mrs. Courtwick pushed down her spectacles and looked at her. Marjorie's heart pounded in expectation, exultant from her reading.

"Why, that's very charming!" Mrs. Courtwick said. She gave a droll little smile and pursed out her lips. "Give this girl some work to develop that little voice, Miss Redding. Very nice—very nice. She has the lyric touch—did you catch that? Small, perhaps—but it's very rare."

"The lyric touch . . . it's very rare." . . . It was true, it was what she really wanted. It went with all the things that she loved—the minuet, *The Daffodils,* the carols on Beacon Hill, the *Idyll* that the two little pink girls had danced. Even in those dreadful "child pieces" that Mrs. Shrader had had her give, she had been groping toward that. Now she knew—she knew for certain.

"The lyric touch . . . very rare." . . . Someone had seen —someone who really knew, the final unassailable authority. When Mrs. Laurie had declared, with mystic fervour, when she had read "Oh, the merry merry May": "That, class, was the real Marjorie Schoessel," she had been ashamed, and angry tears had risen to her eyes. But now she was exultant. She was eager to go to her room and practise. She had always hated to say things aloud at the Association, afraid that the girls might hear. One day, she had been conscientiously trying to practise one of Mrs. Wales' favourites, with the "big tone" that Mrs. Wales always talked about—

> **Come one, come all, this rock shall fly**
> **From its firm base as soon as I!**

When she left her room, flushed from her efforts, Dorothy Stanley had cried hilariously:

"Child, are the rocks flying? Spare the pieces!"

But then, Dorothy always thought that things other people did were so funny, and never seemed to see that Interior Decoration, and "Lyddy's" studio, and cat doorstops, were just as bad.

She paused when she reached the third floor. Everything was quiet, except a trill of "ah-ah-ah-ah-ahs" from Mary Clark's room. She stole into her own little room as if to fulfil a secret compact with herself.

Now, she could "let herself go"—not just "feeling" as when she used to practise her contest piece, but herself, her own self. She read over scraps from the school text-books, whatever appealed to her confused and awakening tastes.

The lark now leaves his wat'ry nest
And climbing shakes his dewy wings.

That was hers, that small soprano note. She thought blissfully of spring flowers, of birds twittering about her window in the summer, of the furry wind-flowers with silken stems that grew along the track and on moist hill-slopes; the bright water of the little creek in Reeds Grove, chilly and fresh. Her room, with its one high window looking out at the roofs of brick houses, shared in the intimacy of this hour. If she heard a step in the hall, a sound of laughter on the stairs, she stopped in the middle of a sentence, holding her breath.

Yes, but the trouble was, what was she going to *do* with this? Mamma thought she ought to be getting up a "repertoire," as Mrs. Shrader had suggested. Mrs. Phillips wanted her to "work up a program" to give for the benefit of the new hospital next summer. Dorothy and the other girls had called the "child pieces" "awf'ly cunnin'." They had been impressed when the girl from the Kate Tucker Winslow School drew a scarf about her shoulders, took her stand at a lighted window, and declaimed in a deep barytone:

"The highwayman was galloping, galloping, galloping.
The *high*wayman was galloping. . . ."

2

Her real hours of secret delight and anticipation were the Friday recitals given by the second-year girls. She always sat beside Emily Reever; and when the program was tedious, Emily drew devil faces in her note-book, with forked tongues and flames spurting from the eyeballs, and labelled them, in delicate printing: "Violet," "Archibald," "Horace," "George." Marjorie was intrigued by Emily's look of scornful quiet in Miss Redding's literature classes. When Emily was questioned, she answered with a reserved disdain which made the girls look at her with respect. She knew more about books than Miss Redding. She sat withdrawn, her eyelids carefully drooped, her thin hands playing with the books in her lap. But when Mrs. Courtwick read, in her terrible husky whisper:

"Why does your blade sae drap wi' blude,
Edward! Edward!"

Emily's lids were quickly lifted, and a sudden intensity blazed in her hazel eyes. Emily understood—she knew when a line was "right." There was a wonderful excitement about these snatches of almost silent intimacy with Emily.

Days of premature spring had come in February. The windows were open and the fresh, disturbing air filled the studios. The clangour of traffic had an alluring, almost a gentle sound.

Miss Curtis, a graduate who had come back for special training, was to read. She was a large, mature girl with a sleepy face, a careless wave of dull black hair. At school, she was "tacky," with her cheap clothes and her pale face that always looked as if it needed washing. But on the platform, she took on a certain grandeur. Through the rich, sensuous, heavy vibration of her voice, words and

phrases stood out as through a strange and lovely haze. The words made a pattern, almost visible; and all were steeped in the intangible splendour of this girl's personality.

> **"With blackest moss the flower-pots**
> **Were thickly crusted, one and all. . . ."**

As she spoke, in her thick sleepy tones, it was like sinking hands into dry dead moss and getting the secret feel of the cold wet earth. . . . "She saw the gusty shadow sway" . . . Marjorie saw Emily's thin tense face, her parted lips and hazel eyes. They went out of the room, silently, got their wraps, fled down the stairs instead of taking the elevator, and—with a sudden quick, half-fearful smile at each other—parted.

Chapter VI

I

GOING home—home that seemed so far away, so incredible, that her life there couldn't have really existed. Still, as she took out her new poetry magazine and the box of butter chocolates from Mary Elizabeth's, she was preoccupied with Boston and Emily.

She remembered the first day she had seen Emily, sitting alone in a corner of the office, in her dark blue coat and velours hat. And now Jessie, Neva—all the girls—were nothing beside Emily. That day when they had cut school together, snatching their wraps and running down the stairs to avoid Mrs. Courtwick; and when they had opened the heavy doors of the office building, the streets had a clean fresh holiday feeling, with all the last remnants of snow changed into shining little streams. An absurd, joyous, exhausting day—walking out along the Esplanade, where the waves of the river were chopping and blue under the lighter blue of the early spring sky; their reckless lunch at Mary Elizabeth's and consequent dinner at Childs'; their gay foolish afternoon going through the Old South Church, two burying-grounds, into a pawnshop, into the Oriental store where Marjorie bought soap, along countless steep Bostonian streets and out to the harbour; ending at the Bijou Theatre, where they rested their burning feet and discussed Dr. and Mrs. Courtwick. The joy of discovering that there was someone else who couldn't bear it when Mrs. Laurie cried, who saw what was "right" in reading, who wanted to hear music and see pictures and burying-grounds, go up in a lighthouse, go out on the ocean, and visit Concord and

Plymouth. After that day, they had been inseparable, together in every class, or sitting hunched up on the cot in Marjorie's room hugging their knees and eagerly sharing their discoveries about the Academy, poetry, Eastern girls, Southern girls, music, actresses.

And then that loveliest day of all, when they had gone with a group of girls from the Academy to Nahant, on a Saturday. Although they had pretended to keep with the others, they had kept lagging behind, standing close to each other when the whole party stopped for Moxie in one of those jackstraw drug stores, sharing their feeling about the blue sea at Lynn, the white sweep and curl of the foam along the level beach. And then sitting out on the great, brown, sun-warmed rocks at Nahant, watching the crevices in which the dark water dashed and flung up a wild spray, all shouting together in the deep and vigorous tones of Mrs. Wales:

"ROLL on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, ROLL!"

She could talk to Emily about home—get clear her ideas of it, not have to make it "wild" and untrue, as she did with Dorothy. Emily wanted to hear how it really was—although she scorned the lodge and the clubs and Miss Orvis' class. Emily said fiercely that nobody could be free in organizations. Emily saw what the tree-house meant—Marjorie did not have to explain. Dorothy used to drop into Marjorie's room, interrupting her practice, commanding her to stop being industrious. She examined Marjorie's photographs, declaring that Bud, with his freckles and snub nose and bright eyes with lids that drooped at the corners, was "simply adorable." She had found an inexhaustible joy in hearing Marjorie talk about Buena Vista; thinking of the West as a wilderness, all of a piece, inhabited by Indians, wild animals and cornfields. She listened with relish to stories of Byron, of the store, of Hummer at funerals, cried: "How weird! Oh, you precious infant!" It was fun to play up to this, to be naïve and small, flattered by Dorothy's

large splendour. But it was not really "wild" at home. The farmers who came into the store were people, not characters in a farce. . . . Emily scorned the Iowa country, because it wasn't "wild," because it had no mountains and no ocean—nothing worth while, only cornfields.

But now as the train left the smooth elderliness of Ohio and Indiana, Marjorie looked out and caught the breath of the prairies with a sense of recognition that was almost more of a discovery than her first sight of strange places. The wideness, the rawness—room for the wind to sweep. After the close compactness of Boston, with its narrow crooked streets, so intimate and dear, Chicago was threateningly huge . . . the approach to it, the endless railroad tracks and huge mounds of cinders, ugliness of old iron; the dark roaring streets with the rushing people, the feeling of a hard, crude, intense vigour.

Beyond Chicago, the prairie stretches began. The familiar sight of farmers out working in the level fields. When the train crossed the Mississippi, she sat with her face close to the window, seeing at the same time a queer little sideways reflection of her own self with her new hat and suit and eager eyes, and the thick grey roll and spread of water beyond the bridge.

A deep joy of recognition stirred in her heart at the sight of the long smooth roll of the land. This was hers. The moist black earth, the rich green of late May. Her mind detached itself from the minds of the other girls and became solitary, itself, exultant. . . .

They must have been having a good deal of rain—she thought of farmers coming into the store with overcoats open and fresh country-smelling mud on their boots. The smooth rounded slopes of the pastures were emerald-green, thick and mossy at the edges of the creeks. The leaves of the young green corn were bright and tender in the black fields. There were apple-trees still in bloom, the blossoms wide open, with broad white petals that had drifted over the grass in great flakes. Some of the oaks had been late in

leafing out. Here stood one on the slope of a pasture, sturdy and spreading, a thick heavy outline upon the blue sky, the leaves in curls of moist yellow-green upon the dark gnarled branches. It was as if she had never before realized those old-fashioned houses "on the edge of town" . . . white, sometimes with shutters, a snowball-bush, a barn and chicken yard, an old man in the yard, pausing to look after the train.

The names of the stations were growing familiar. She saw with satisfaction, reflected dimly in the window, the trimness of her new hat of shining black straw with its cockade. Her veil—she had bought it to shock mamma, and she turned so that she could see the little embroidered bug that made a black, delicate, fantastic pattern against the pink of her left cheek; blushing when she saw that the man across the aisle had seen her and was smiling. Her new spring suit with its narrow skirt and her long-vamp pumps gave her a feeling of delightful patronage toward Buena Vista, under which lay the excited eagerness of her return.

This was Leland through which the train was going with only a momentary slowing down—the same wooden platform, the baggage truck, the scattering of houses beyond the track. It was where Ray Bender used to live. She began to get her things together.

The man across the aisle smiled involuntarily at her. "You must be getting home," he said.

She gave him a bright, breathless smile, forgetting all about "not speaking to strangers on the train." On her first night in the sleeper, she had thought of those stories the girls told and relished—even Edith Robinson—about men disguised as nuns, and terrible women who offered to take charge of young girls travelling. All that was silly. The journey was all the happier because the man recognized that she was a girl getting home from school. She looked up, flushed, brightly pleased, when he said:

"How are you going to get off with all those things to carry? You just let me take that big bag."

She followed him down the aisle, pleased with the urban look of her bag and remembering the days of the telescope. She was far from those days now. He set the bag down on the station platform, smiling again in genial amusement at her mingling of childish expectation and delight in her new clothes, and nodded in response to her thanks, leaping expertly on to the steps of the moving train.

2

Those same old bricks of the platform. How little the station was! This was really Buena Vista. She went into the depot to ask if she could leave part of her baggage until Bud could get it. Mr. Bush, in his vest and shirt-sleeves, with his grey felt hat pushed back on his head, exclaimed:

"Well, well, well! This is a surprise, ain't it? I don't believe the folks are expecting you until to-morrow."

"I know it," Marjorie said with shining eyes. "I'm going to surprise them. How's Mildred, Mr. Bush?"

"Mildred's in Cedar Falls. Yep. Taking a teacher's course. Well, I'll keep an eye on the things for you. I'll just set 'em in the office. Be a little safer. Well, you'd oughta told the folks you's coming, so you'd get a ride in that new car."

"Our car! Has *papa* got a car? Why, those dreadful, awful people! They didn't write a single word about it!"

"They didn't! Well, now, maybe somebody else was planning a surprise." Mr. Bush would not tell her more than that. "You just take a look around when you get home."

"I will take a look around! I think they're simply awful!"

She was amazed and half indignant at the successful duplicity of papa and mamma.

She hurried down the back way home, wanting to see no one before she had seen "the folks," but feeling all the time the elegant conspicuousness of her new suit and veil with the bug. She took with her only her hateful umbrella, that wouldn't go into the trunk, and the Boston bag that she had bought with the Christmas money from Grandma and Grandpa Blossom. In a daze of home-coming excitement, she saw the familiar houses, that had been here all the time that she was gone, people living in them just the same, doing things from day to day! The old livery barn was actually being made over into a garage.

"Hello, Marge!" a voice called from somewhere.

She cried, surprised and pleased: "Hello!"

That same deep excitement stirred at the sight of the courthouse tower rising from the trees, of old Mr. Bishop's house with the brown trimmings and the fat old snuffly terrier lying out on the porch.

She did not glance at the Putz house. She must get home first, talk to no one until she had seen mamma and Bud—Buster! Oh . . . she looked eagerly at the wide sloping lawn to see if Buster was there, lying out by the cellar door. The yard looked so big, so spreading and easy. She had not known that the house did need painting, and that there were some posts loose in the railing of the porch. Their house was not new any more—almost elderly. . . . She did not look up at the tree-house, not wanting to think about it yet.

She walked on tiptoe up the front steps. As she paused a moment to set down her Boston bag, she was again amazed, almost shocked, to realize that all this year her family, "the folks," had been living here in her own home without her, living just the same!—that she heard now, inside, voices quite unconscious of her.

She gave the bell a sharp peal. She tried to compose her face to an extreme dignity. Someone was coming. She

stood a little way from the door. Bud, with his cap on, and a baseball mitt in his hand, opened it.

She asked: "Is this where Mrs. E. W. Schoessel lives?"

He actually started to answer her. Then his mouth opened. "Well, gee! Well, for gosh sake! Marge Schoessel—gee whiz! I thought it was somebody else."

She kissed him with eager delight, adoring his round freckled face and stiff funny strands of brown hair.

"Isn't mamma here?"

He was still crying, a little indignantly: "Well, gee whiz, we didn't think you were coming till to-morrow!"

She heard her mother call. She ran into the kitchen as well as her new narrow skirt would let her, and hugged her mother triumphantly, delighting in mamma's amazement, and slenderness, her helplessness in that fierce embrace. Bud had followed them into the kitchen, still holding the baseball mitt, crying: "Well, gee whiz, I didn't know who it was at the door! I thought it was an agent."

"Agent!" Marjorie said indignantly.

"I thought you had perfume or something in that little bag. Looks like the one old Mamie Tompkins used to carry."

"Why, Bud Schoessel! That's a Boston bag. Everyone carries one there."

She had to explain in a whirl how she had happened to come to-day, what train she had taken out of Chicago—stopping to cry reproachfully: "Mamma Schoessel, and you terrible people never wrote me that you had a new car! I think you're simply awful!"

"We were going to the station for you in that to-morrow and surprise you," Bud said.

"Well, you didn't surprise me!" she cried triumphantly. "I got ahead of you this much, anyway!"

"How'd you know about the car? Gee, Marge, you want to see me drive her. She's a bird, all right. Gosh, she can go!"

"Stand off and let me look at you!" mamma commanded.

"I've got on my new suit, madam!" The new skirt was too tight for a curtsy. "You haven't said a single word about it."

"Oh, I've been noticing it, darling. Do they wear the skirts that tight?"

"*Every*body does. I got it at Filene's."

Bud began to laugh. "Oh, gosh! Look at that bug!"

But his bright, hazel-brown eyes with their drooping lids, his round-cheeked freckled face, shone with proud appreciation of his sister's splendour. He had forgotten where he was going with the baseball mitt, could not get himself out of the kitchen, where he joined in the talk of his mother and sister with the matter-of-fact interest in feminine concerns of a petted younger brother.

Marjorie found everything tumbling out in an excited flood—things that she had meant to keep and tell impressively. She stopped in the midst of a description of Mary Elizabeth's—"Margie, I'm afraid that's where a lot of your money went" . . . "Oh, mamma, you'd just love that adorable place, you'd *have* to spend money there!"—to demand hungrily: "*Where's* Buster?"

"Where is Buster, Bud?"

"Gee, I don't know. He goes to the garage with Rich most of the time now. Gee, you'd oughta seen how scared he was when we first made him get into the car! I held him and papa took hold of his collar, and, gee, he just shook all over like he does when it thunders."

"Oh, *poor* old Buster!" Marjorie cried pityingly.

"Well, he's gotta learn unless he gets left behind all the time, don't he? Shoot, that isn't so bad as trying to run their legs off and keep up with the car, like some dogs do."

"No, but——" She stopped to exclaim: "Garage! Does Rich work at the garage?"

"Why, Margie, we wrote you!"

"Mamma Schoessel, you didn't!"

"I don't believe you more than half read some of our letters. And, Margie, you must write oftener to the girls

next year. I know you're making lovely new friends, but you've known Jessie and Kat ever since you started into Sunday School."

"Well, mamma, I did write them, but goodness, how do you suppose I had time to do everything!"

She heard Bud, out in the yard, calling: "Buster! Hey, Buster!" She ran out and waited on the steps, rejoicing in the elegant feel of her suit, looking with a kind of deep wistfulness at the back yard, the maple . . . There was her tree-house, her very own place.

"There he is! Margie's own, old Buster!"

She could hardly endure the joy and compassion and obscure remorse as she heard Buster's eager bark answering Bud's call, saw him come dashing over the grass and through the garden with his mad, pathetic, doggy wildness of joy. "He didn't forget Margie, did he! Of course he didn't!" She put her arms around his neck as he stood panting, and whispered: "Buster, I didn't see another dog all the time I was away that was half as nice as you are!" His liquid eyes—getting older now—looked up so eagerly, and he trembled and whined a little. But as soon as they moved, he was dashing off ahead of them, old as he was.

Bud was standing grinning. He said: "Come on in the barn, Marge, let me show you something."

"Come on, Buster, come with us."

"Sure, Buster can come." Bud gave the dog's head a rough caress.

In the barn, that was slightly chilly and dark, with the big sliding door to the alley closed, Bud showed off with ingenuous pride the splendour of the new grey auto hearse with crinkled draperies.

"That's a mighty fine-looking hearse now, I'm here to tell you. It's better'n any you'll find in any town around here. Gee, you oughta seen how scared old Hummer was the first time he had to drive it!"

"Does Hummer drive it?"

"Sure. Bet I do, this summer, though, for the first fellow

that dies. Aw, you have to drive the hearse so slow, though. Gosh, that's no sport. Marge, you tell papa you want to drive in the Buick, and I'll take you around by the fairgrounds. That's a swell road. I'll teach you to drive, Marge. Neva Cole drives Coles' car. Gee, she can drive it a darn sight better'n Mr. Cole! He wears out every brake."

Marjorie hugged her arms together, shivering. The old hearse was gone, the black woollen plumes and the harness no longer hung from their big nail against the rough, woody-smelling wall. Mingled with a kind of affection for these old things, that had been part of her childhood, was a fastidious distaste of the undertaking business. She was ashamed of it—ashamed, and still willing enough to use the money from it to go away to school. That was one of those dreadful messy things for which she and Emily had decided there could be no help except recognition and endurance. Bud was disgusted because she would not see what the hearse was like inside.

"Oh, gosh, you act like Neva Cole, or one of those silly girls!"

When they left the barn, she felt with a momentary poignancy the softness of the late spring air . . . the sweetness and graciousness of the flowers in the back yard—that homely graciousness. The balls of leafy white blossoms on the snowball-bush were full and limp, with brown patches, and on the thick short grass lay a sprinkling of tiny petals. Not many would be left for Decoration Day this year. She had a vivid remembrance of carrying big branches of snowballs to the Armoury, of all the ladies exclaiming over them, of Mrs. Bradley giving her a bunch of them to carry out to the cemetery with the stems wrapped in crumply silver paper . . . the long hot dusty road, all the little girls marching . . . She and Emily had decided that it was wrong to have even Decoration Day to help perpetuate the memory of wars. Going back to the house, she kept in secret the sight of the little green maple leaves against the delicately tinted sky.

She was too restless to stay anywhere—followed her mother about the kitchen, started to do things and then forgot them.

"Mamma, do you need me? Because I believe I'll go to the store."

"No, there isn't anything for you to do. Yes, go on, while you've got on your pretty new suit. You can ride home in the new car."

"Grand!"

She hurried eagerly down the street, very conscious of her clothes. She felt just a little sense of loneliness at her perception of the new intimacy between mamma and Bud—as if Bud had taken her place with mamma in the kitchen. Not that she had seemed especially eager to hold that place when she was at home! In spite of her joy at homecoming, it seemed that people could get along without other people.

Buster stood at the very edge of the walk, quivering and panting.

She cried: "Of *course* you can come with Margie, Buster!" And she went on talking to him, foolishly and happily. "You can go with Margie everywhere all summer. She won't go anywhere Buster can't go."

She remembered how Dorothy Stanley had shrieked: "You *in*-fant!" because she had said that Buster Schoessel was the most gentlemanly dog in Buena Vista, that he never went running around other people's yards or buried bones anywhere but in his own alley. She hugged to herself defiantly the love of this familiar street with the big trees, against the thought of Dorothy's high-pitched amusement —"Tell me more about your wild country, little stranger!"

Hummer was in the front of the store. He was both abashed and delighted.

"See who's come! Is that a Boston big-bug you've carried away on your veil? Ain't you afraid he'll bite you? Or maybe he's a kissing bug!"

But all the same, Hummer was impressed by the veil.

Papa was in the back of the store with a customer. She stood back waiting, reserved and elegant, the fashionable young daughter of the merchant. The customer, a woman from Oak Grove, gave her furtive glances of sharp, hostile curiosity.

"This your girl?" she demanded.

"This is my girl!" papa said.

Papa looked older than she had realized. It had never seemed to her that papa and mamma could get different, ever, from what they had always been. Papa's face—wide, like Grandma Schoessel's and Aunt Lottie's, with soft pleasant German features—was colourless and had deep folds. He was shabby, too, in his old loose coat and trousers that did not match, dusty from the store. But he was papa just the same—quiet, kind, dependable, with a little humorous beam in his eye when he noticed the bug. Although she disapproved severely because his trousers and coat did not match, she was happy with him.

"Well, does everything look the same, Margie?"

"Just about. Only town seems so little!"

But it was exciting to drive home in the new car; to realize that this car with the shining black hood was their own, with all the new richness that it promised.

"How do you like her, Margie?"

"I like it!"

"Well, it looked as if we'd have to have one."

Mamma had the things that she liked for supper—hot biscuits and rose-geranium jelly. She had sent Bud to the new bakery for a cake. Rich had not known that Marjorie was at home until he saw her at the table.

"Well, for Pete's sake, look who's here!"

"Yes, if you'd known that, you might have got home in time for supper," mamma said, with a certain air of reproach.

Rich scrubbed his hands with mechanic's soap, and then came back to the table and ate silently. Marjorie fought angrily against having the thought of Rich and Eva, and

"all that business," spoil the pleasantness of supper. She would have to hear all about it again.

Mamma said that she must run over and see Mrs. Putz and Orpha for a moment. Mrs. Putz had had a fall during the winter, and ever since then had been much more feeble. Both she and Orpha were ready with the old admiration—Orpha, tall, gaunt, with her heavy dark hair and her scarred face with its look of intense, yearning fondness. Here, in the dark little parlour with the smell of carpet and plants, Marjorie felt that she was at home.

3

Mamma and papa had to go to lodge to-night. Marjorie refused to go with them, saying that she was too tired, but remembering what Emily had said about lodges.

"You'd better come up after the meeting, then," mamma said. "You'll see so many people. And they're going to have refreshments. Perhaps if it isn't too late we can have a ride in the car."

When they had left, Marjorie played over little snatches of things on the piano, picking out with one finger a tiny air from a sonata that she had heard at Symphony. She was lonely for the Association, the living-room and the girls dancing—scarcely knew yet whether she was here or there. Rich had gone off to see Eva, of course.

"Well, I guess I might as well take you up to the lodge rooms," Bud said with his funny solemnity.

As they walked along, her eyes were taking roving glances about the streets in the dark blue of the May evening. After the city streets, she was aware of the fragrance, long familiar, that came from the lawns where dew was thick in the bright, cool, green grass. Passing old Mrs. Putz' house, she could faintly smell the dark peonies that lay with their ruffled satiny petals upon the damp grass.

Bud was telling her about high school. "Gee, I bet I make the basketball team next year. Old Red'll be out of school

then. Aw' say, old Prosser was sure sore when the kids put that chicken in the piano last Hallowe'en."

"Why, Bud Schoessel!"

"Well, gee, I wasn't one of them! I know who they were, though, and where they got that old bird."

The long windows of the lodge room above Patterson's store made lighted oblongs in the night. Cars were parked around the corner, where one big tree was left to cast a dusky shadow.

"Well, I guess I'll take you up here and then I'll go on," Bud said.

Marjorie climbed the old wooden stairway. Lodge was over. Women were getting refreshments together in the kitchen—thick lodge cups filled with coffee, and sandwiches. They were cutting cakes and dishing out the yellowish ice cream. Mrs. Fitzpatrick cried archly:

"Well, well! I see none of those Eastern fellows have run off with you yet!"

"Where's mamma?"

"In the other room. She's not one of the kitchen crew to-night. Go in, the meeting's all over."

In spite of her new disapproval of lodges, the old room was homelike to her. It was where she used to come to "speak a piece" at programs, or to play a duet with Neva. The long room carpeted in red, the two platforms with their shallow steps and ecclesiastical chairs, the raised dais around the room and the folding chairs ranged about it. The little room at the side, where the emblems and banners were kept, where the children used to try on decorations and parade with spears after the program.

She felt flushed and warm at the friendliness of the greetings. Mrs. Cole was eyeing her suit, her eyes keen although her lips were set in a complacent smile. Mrs. Phillips was there, in one of her dresses of shining dark silk, with new jet beads. She kept Marjorie conspicuously with her and they talked about the East together. She blandly refused the gum that Mr. Willis had brought, as usual, and that he

passed with jovial comments—"Well, ladies, I don't want you left out, and since you won't have a cigar . . ." Marjorie sat between her mother and Mrs. Phillips when the cake and ice cream and coffee were passed. She had to answer heavily facetious questions about Boston.

"Where's Neva, Mrs. Cole?"

"She's at the Lake just now, with some school friends—lovely people. You know, I told you about the father who manufactures the Clamp-on-Clothes Pins? Well, those girls. You must come and see her as soon as she gets back."

The Schoessels left as soon as the refreshments were over.

"Is it too late for a little drive, Ed?"

"No, I guess not."

He backed out the car from among the others and brought it up to the corner.

"Papa *does* know how to drive!" Marjorie exclaimed in amazement.

"Do you hear that, papa? Our daughter doesn't believe her old father capable of driving!"

"Yes, I do, mamma. Only it seems so funny that the car really belongs to us. I don't believe it."

"I do," her father said. "My bank account believes it."

"Where are you going, Ed?"

He did not hear. When the car rounded the corner by the Baptist church and sped down the long pale streak of new paving toward the cemetery, mamma said in a low voice: "I'm glad. He's taking us on the river road."

Marjorie sat dreaming in the back seat, in the delicious feeling of driving through the blue May night, in which the trees stood duskily silent—only the edges of the leaves lighted—and the evergreens in the cemetery were sombre and tall.

When they got out into the country, they felt the wetness and silence of the night. Leafy trees standing lone in pastures had blurred and misty outlines. The woods lay black and brooding on the left, and through them breathed the dank, cool night odour of the river.

Chapter VII

I

MARJORIE turned lazily on her side and held back the crisp dotted Swiss curtain. Mamma had had her curtains, and her white bedspread, freshly laundered. They were whiter than things had ever seemed to be at the Association—a special kind of whiteness that meant home.

She lay there looking out at the lawn. Mamma had said she was not to get up until she felt like it. So fresh everything was—so wide and spreading and homelike. She knew, without seeing, how gay the pansies were beside the wall—those little early pansy plants that mamma always got at the greenhouse to set out in the spring. What delight it had been to go there with mamma, after school—to step down through the narrow doorway from the office into that long, earthy-scented room where there was just space to walk along a narrow plank between shallow boxes of spicy carnations . . . then into that warm, sunny room where a faint steam rose under the greenish-white skylight, where ferns were fresh and high, and where it was ecstasy to touch the waxen petals of the calla lilies growing tall on stiff green stems. . . . She thought of the sunny peace of the back yard—birds flying about the eaves, old Buster sitting out on his cistern top, Bud's bicycle leaning against the barn; of the narrow alley like a green lane between barns and gardens and trees.

There was that same sweet, silent freshness in the room. The old India matting was long ago worn out, but her little rug was so clean and bright! As she stretched down one

arm and rubbed the stiff short nap with her forefinger, she could hear downstairs the high whirr of the vacuum with its sudden dying down . . . a household sound. Papa had let her pick out this rug from samples that a travelling man had brought to the store. Now she would have chosen little braided mats on a polished floor—but this was hers, she loved it.

She could hear sounds downstairs. Mamma moving about in the dining-room. A door slammed, a whistle, Bud riding off on his bicycle. She meant to get up—but kept on lying there, playing with the curling end of her long braid, looking dreamily out at the lawn. Drowsy, comfortable as she was, there was somehow a dim, underlying sense of disturbance. So many things would have to be explained to mamma—why she was going to leave the Association and room with Emily, why she hadn't found a church home, what she had learned at the Academy. People would expect her to make an impression with new, effective readings—to have a "repertoire."

Pop-overs! Mamma knew how she liked those. Now she really would get up. She pulled her kimono about her and scurried to the bathroom. There was a new shower—the family life, with the car and the shower, with mamma driving to Wahseta to do part of her shopping, seemed to be improving satisfactorily. Except for the porch posts, and papa's old clothes and look of seediness. She revelled in the thick, clean, homelike Turkish towels that she got from the lowest shelf of the white cupboard. She could take all the time she wanted this morning, and for mornings and mornings—bathe and bathe and bathe, make her toe-nails perfect so that she could do barefoot dancing, use hot oil before she had a shampoo, become beautiful. Practise, and improve herself, and learn to drive the car. . . .

The window of thick frosted glass was up a little way. The curtain softly stirred. She could see in the steamy mirror how her short hairs clung, half curling, to the fine smooth skin that she had rubbed pink. She felt the fresh-

ness, the warm relaxation of early summer. She drew her kimono around her and ran flapping through the hall in the straw mules that she had bought at the Oriental store.

"Margie! Are you coming down soon?"

"Yes, ma'am! In three jerks!"

She dashed into her room. There was a pleasure in the very oldness of the clean white underwear that she got out of the cedar chest. That funny old corset cover with eyelet embroidery that Aunt Bessie had made for her! Her closet was clean, almost empty except for a pair of last year's pumps on the floor and two old summer dresses. One was of pink chambray, faded to a dim brownish tint, but washed and starched a little. She put it on, feeling domestic, and wound her hair in Gretchen braids around her head. She put on the old pumps, discarded last fall with scorn, and some white stockings that she unearthed from a drawer.

"Are you nearly ready, Margie?"

"Coming!"

She flew down the stairs, just touching the shining surface of the window-seat on the landing to tell it that she remembered that view of the hard maple from the window.

She liked to be eating alone, and late, with all the little breakfast things clustered about her plate. Just as she had always thought it such a distinction and consolation, when any little thing ailed her, to have mamma bring her meal on a tray.

"Oh! Strawberries!"

"Yes. They're almost the last."

"Don't wait on me, mamma. I'll get my things."

"Oh, mamma will bring them to you this morning. She hasn't had any little girl to do things for, for a long time. What kind of jelly would you like, dear?"

"Any kind, mamma," she said generously. "Don't go down cellar for me."

"You might as well have things like that while you're at home. This is some of that jelly we made from the plums Aunt Bessie sent us. Didn't it turn out well? . . . We get

lovely cream now. You must drink all you can of it—I'd like to fatten you up a little. Old Mr. Webb has the nicest Jersey cow."

"I suppose he pleads with it, and talks about the Lord!"

"Oh, well, the poor old man! You know Kat is going to be married, don't you? You must go over and see her chest."

She blissfully put butter and jelly on the crisp, hot, goldy-brown pop-overs. There were a few blue pansies in a little glass basket on the table, their squarish stems pale green through the clear water. The drowsy morning sounds from outside were so different from the sounds at 72 St. John Street.

As soon as she had finished, she carried her things into the kitchen and wiped the dishes for mamma. She had never known before just how fresh and dainty everything was at home—even the dishes on the drain-board, steaming from the hot rinse water that ran down into the white sink.

As they worked, mamma gave her the news. About Mrs. Cole and Neva planning to go again to California for the winter; about Hummer's having a new girl and how it "looked really serious this time"; and, of course, all about Rich and Eva. Mamma and papa were afraid that as soon as Rich worked into the garage business, he and Eva would be married. It was a shame, it had almost broken mamma's heart—with all Rich's ability, and the education they had been willing to give him.

"Margie, we don't understand at all what you plan to do next year. Mamma and papa couldn't get a thing out of your letters, they were *so* unsatisfactory. You were so vague in answering all mamma's questions."

"Well, goodness, mamma, I've told everything, I don't see what it is you want to know."

"Why, about leaving the Association. We thought you liked it so well. Mrs. Phillips thought it was a wonderful chance for you—getting to meet those wonderful women, and all. We don't know who this Emily is—and then all

of a sudden we hear that you're going to room with her!"

Marjorie tried eagerly to tell about Emily—how she was the only girl in the school who had dared to defy Mrs. Courtwick, and how she was going to write plays.

"But why didn't Emily want to stay at the Association with you, if it's such a nice place?"

She veered away with despair of ever making mamma understand. She couldn't tell mamma that Emily didn't want to pay regular board because she had to get money for plays and music out of her eating-money. Then mamma would worry, and think that Marjorie wasn't going to do "regular eating" next year. Emily said you weren't "free" at the Association—and mamma would think that "free" meant something dreadful. Marjorie's vague picture of herself and Emily next year moving in an advanced Bohemian atmosphere, was spoiled and brought unpleasantly down to earth by the old need of explaining everything satisfactorily at home. But then, mamma thought that Emily must be a "nice girl" because her father was a Baptist minister. She did not know that Emily scorned all churches and would only go to swami and spiritualist meetings—to see what they were like; that Emily had said only second-rate people ever were disciples. . . . Emily declared that she was a pantheist, and she made disdainful sport of Marjorie's leaning toward the Episcopalian Church.

"People always feel more religious when they get up and sit down oftener. I wouldn't be a suffragist, and then go to a church where the women haven't any voice. I'd be *ashamed* to think I had to wear a hat if I went to the Episcopalian Church. Do you know what that means?" Emily had demanded, with a fiery glance. "A lot of those old Jews tried to put it off on the women, the way men always do. Paul didn't dare look at women and so he had to pretend it was religious and put it in the Bible for them to wear hats to church! And women are such awful sickening sheep, they all go on and do it and then feel righteous about it."

"It isn't any worse than having immersion in the Baptist Church!"

"It is. Lots worse. Because, anyway, men and women get ducked just the same. One has to stay under as long as the other."

It had hurt Marjorie to have Emily say, with a curl of the lips, that the Congregational Church was just a wishy-washy Church—just the kind of a Church they would have in Iowa, where there weren't any mountains or ocean . . . while Marjorie sat back rebellious, inwardly defending both the Church and the Iowa landscape. There was more to it than believing or not believing. It was all bound up with trusting thoughts of home—Miss Orvis' class, the Christmas tree, suppers in the basement, taking mamma's big fern to the church, and helping to decorate for the Easter service. But there was a perilous fascination in hearing Emily say these things. And when she went to the Catholic cathedral afterwards, with its stone floors and wooden prayer benches, everything seemed so old, almost shoddy, unromantic. Perhaps nothing was romantic when you knew more about it. . . .

"But where are you girls going to stay?" mamma asked. "Two young girls living unprotected in a great city——"

"Unprotected! What could *happen* to us?"

"You don't know what might happen!" mamma said darkly.

"Oh, mamma! You sound like Mrs. Fitz.!"

Marjorie set her lips rebelliously. But mamma was so dear with her soft dark hair and slender girlish shoulders in the checked lavender house dress. Marjorie leaned over and daintily kissed mamma's little chin. Mamma tried to be dignified, to keep her attitude of disapproval, but she melted immediately.

"Oh, yes, I know how girls do," she sighed. "But just the same, mamma doesn't like the notion of it."

"Yes, dearest little Mrs. Schoessel, you do like it," Mar-

jorie coaxed. "You like whatever your daughter likes."

"Oh, I know that's what my daughter believes!"

They would be together next year—she and Emily—Bohemian and free; although she didn't want to wear a dirty smock and live in a cold, cluttered-up studio with a kitchen sink, and dishes and papers and cigarette stubs all mixed up, like that artist whom Dorothy Stanley knew. And they had decided that some day they were going to London together, and live in lodgings with window-boxes, and have the cloth laid in their own room, and eat cheese and a brown loaf for supper.

There was still the subject of the school. How could she ever make mamma understand that, in spite of the lack of system and the way the school was run financially, she was "getting something"? She floundered helplessly and impatiently as she tried to explain at least enough to satisfy mamma; keeping, all the time, the secret of what she cared for there.

"Margie, you've never told me what pieces you learned this year."

"Oh, mamma, don't say 'pieces'!" Marjorie wailed.

"Well—readings, then. But don't you think that when your mother and father give you the money to study, they might at least know something of what you're doing?"

"Well——" Marjorie gave a despairing sigh. "That fairy-story."

"The one Mrs. Laurie praised? But is that anything you can give?"

"Oh, mamma, you don't learn things just to *give* them!"

"Well, what do you learn them for?"

"Why, to teach you how to do things. Development. Oh, dear, I can't explain. Just so that you learn—oh, well, how to do things—and get criticized—and everything like that."

"But certainly in a whole year you've learned something! I wrote you that Mrs. Phillips wants you to give a program for the hospital benefit."

"I can't give a whole program!" Marjorie cried wildly. "You don't learn things like that the first year."

"Why, you knew almost enough things last year to do that."

"Last year! I'd rather perish than give those awful things I gave last year!"

"Why, Margie, they were lovely! Mrs. Phillips thought this would be such a nice opportunity for you. You certainly must be able to get up a program after a whole year in the East!"

Marjorie hung up the dish towel as quickly as she could and went out to her old refuge in the back yard. Everyone would think that with her Eastern training, she ought to give one of those big, dishonest, effective things—like women on the lecture course, who recited things in costume, and played to the audience all the time, didn't really care about what they were doing. Mamma would think that Mrs. Shrader had taught her more than she had learned at the Academy, because Mrs. Shrader had drilled her on "pieces." Pearle Waggoner Shrader . . . She used to feel a deep sense of shame, she didn't know why, when Mrs. Shrader read to music—the way she and Neva had felt when old Mr. Webb had clasped their hands and begged them tremulously to "come to Jesus." Just this little time she had been at home —already the old things were closing around her, the bright new things were far away.

If only she didn't care so much for everything—even for the way the snowball-bush made a shady little corner near the cistern.

2

Jessie was working in the telephone office this summer. Marjorie went to find her in the afternoon. Although it was getting hot, she put on her new suit again. She was pleasingly conscious of it as she went along the street—conscious of women who looked at her and then murmured: "Why, that must be Marjorie Schoessel!"

Already, in spite of the superiority of having been away, she was hungry for companionship. She eagerly climbed the splintery wooden stairs, worn down in the middle, that led to the telephone office. Feeling leisurely and elegant, she went into the hot little room where the two Centrals sat on the high revolving chairs at the switchboard. She had to wait until Jessie was free. She sat listening to the incessant clicking, and marvelling because Jessie's voice sounded just like the voice of a regular Central . . . "Allo . . . allo . . . allo, Oak Grove." It was so strange to think of one of her own crowd—one of the S.S.'s—grown-up, a Central, "out in the world." The other Central was a heavy-set, coarse-looking young woman with a cross face and suspicious black eyes, thick ankles in cotton stockings.

Jessie wheeled around in her lofty chair. The ear-pieces that she had to wear crushed down her thin, soft, curly black hair and gave her a tired, dishevelled look. Her little face was sallow and shone with heat.

"Oh, when did you get back, Marge?"

"Just yesterday. When are you going home?"

"Not until six."

"Oh, dear, I wanted to walk home with you."

Marjorie stayed a little while, but their talk was constantly interrupted by the loud clicking that already made her head swim. Jessie could not talk freely because of the other Central. Her thin little hand kept working nervously with the plugs on the switchboard in front of her.

Marjorie realized dimly that Jessie was awed by her new suit and the fact that she had been studying in the East. Jessie was afraid that Marjorie had "changed." There was a barrier between them—she could not tell Jessie all about Emily and Boston, the things that Emily said about churches and organizations, as she had been eager to do. It seemed to her, resentfully, that this was Jessie's fault. When she went over to the Evanses' in the evening, to ask Jessie to go for a walk, she found several of the girls who had always been known as "that other crowd"—Helen Murphy who

clerked in at Patterson's, and Fanny Bailey who worked at the courthouse. Neva said that Jessie had "got into that crowd."

"She doesn't go with us at all any more. I'm sure I've been perfectly nice to her, but she seems to think we don't want her. Oh, well," Neva confided, "Jessie really belongs with those girls more than with us. I always thought so."

Marjorie was silent. She remembered how she and Jessie used to talk up in the tree-house, and plan to marry English lords. But she did not care to go with "those other girls." They were second-rate, and knew it. They had little fancy-work parties where they talked about the high-school crowd, who was the prettiest girl and who the most popular; and they took striped sacks of grocery-store chocolates to the movies and stealthily watched all the couples.

In spite of herself, Marjorie found that it was Neva whom she was with this summer. The crowd had broken up. Mildred was at summer school, Kat was getting ready to be married. Neva and Marjorie could drive and walk together; and the occasional attentions of Chub Patterson and Miss Ida Willis' nephew gave them a topic of conversation and made their position among the social élite of the town more secure.

Neva had become very friendly with Annie Jackson (now anxious to be called Anne). In the afternoon or early evening, Neva took the Cole car and drove with Marjorie and Anne down the river road that led past the old mill. Then they stopped at the drug store, sitting elegantly in the car while Rex Willis, who was working at the soda fountain, brought them out Willis Specials in tall silver mugs. Neva sat with one long, slim, satiny white hand thrown over the steering-wheel. She was idly flippant in regard to the town, always adding: "even in Buena Vista." Rex Willis, who was still in high school, was flattered when Neva talked to him. Boys admired Neva, but they were afraid of her. They thought that she believed herself "too good for anyone in Buena Vista," Rich had told Marjorie.

Marjorie went to see Kat's hope chest. She wrote to Emily:

"One of the girls in our crowd is going to be married and I suppose it's up to me to give a *shower* for her since all the other girls have. She hasn't stuck her nose outside Buena Vista since we graduated and now she's going to just settle down and be like everybody else here. I had to say how lovely all her things were but I think it's awful to be married like that and never do anything or anything. The women in this town make me sick just talking about operations and things. I suppose Kat will be like that and have a fern in the front window."

But really she had been impressed by Kat's eager joy in the embroidered towels and lunch cloths, and pink and blue holders, in the hope chest. She had taken delight in preparing the refreshments for the shower. And she had even been dissatisfied to think that the tall, fair-haired, athletic young man, smoking a brier pipe and wearing knickerbockers and reading good books (long in her secret thoughts), had not materialized in Boston. Only that funny little man with the moustache who had asked Dorothy Stanley "if he couldn't meet her delightful friend," and the boy from Shell Rock who was going to Tech and whom she had asked to the Association dance—and he was engaged to a girl in Shell Rock. Of course she would never think of marrying anyone like Fish Carter, who only read the *Detective Story Magazine* and had dreadful-looking nails.

She had meant to lay out a schedule for herself and stick to it. But there were only a few times that she really practised. She got out the old volume of Tennyson from the bookcase, and tried to read as Miss Curtis had done.

Ask me no more: the moon may draw the sea; . . .

She read that in an impassioned whisper, and then flushed scarlet. It was not that austere delight in poetry that Emily demanded. This was a strange breathless indulgence that made the blood warm in her cheeks. She had vague, shining visions of herself in some art centre reading lyrics—or acting in a Little Theatre, as Emily wanted to do.

But she could not give lyrics when it came to the program for the hospital benefit. And there was no hope of getting out of that. She had to find things that people would like. But there was one mercy—Mrs. Phillips had decided that it would not "do" to leave some of the other girls, like Frances Patterson, off the program.

The summer passed, after all, without anything being really different. The car was needed for the store and she did not learn to drive it. Papa liked his dinner at noon, and mamma wouldn't change it. Even her dear little Bud was changed and older. He "had a girl" and went in a high-school crowd. The only one with whom she felt just the old companionship was Buster. Sometimes, with a queer gnawing loneliness, she took her book and went out beside Buster as he lay on the cistern top. It was sadly comforting there, with the dark mysterious shine of water through the cracks, and the ground bare and cool under the heavy snowball-bush.

All at once it was nearly time to go back to Boston. What had she done all summer? Mamma had had to keep urging her to get her underwear ready, or she would not even have done that. But, of course, it would all be different after next year, when everything would be settled once for all.

At the last moment they could not get the Balcom sisters and had to fall back upon a week's help with the sewing from Minnie Clapsaddle. Mamma thought Minnie would do well enough if Marjorie told her exactly how things were to be. Marjorie scorned the commonplace patterns from the household magazines. She bought a copy of *French Fashions* in Wahseta. But the basque dresses shown there on the long undulating forms of tinted maidens proved to be beyond Minnie's powers. The new pink charmeuse was a dreadful failure—"simply a botch," Marjorie thought, tugging at it hopelessly.

"It *is* wrong, mamma! Just look at it," she demanded tragically.

Mamma would not admit it at first. "Why, dear, you

just think it looks that way, just because it isn't exactly like the picture——"

"I don't *think!* Look at this frightful waist—just like a . . . flour sack—and tell me if I think that!"

"Well, the waist isn't exactly right, I see that. But I think we can remedy that. See, if we bring it in a little more here——" mamma urged cheerfully.

Marjorie twitched away. "It's cut wrong. The more anybody does to it, the more messy it'll be."

"Well, Margie, I distrusted those fussy styles. I thought you ought to have stuck to the old patterns. It's just the way you told Minnie you wanted it."

"Mamma, it's wrong, you know it is! Why do you talk that way?"

"Put it on again. Let me look at it. . . . Well, it isn't quite right," mamma admitted reluctantly. "But why did you let Minnie go on with it, and cut up all that good cloth? Your things are costing so much, Marjorie—if you have to have a new winter coat . . . Never mind. Leave it here. You can wear your old dress just at first. When Aunt Bessie comes a little later, I think she can do something to it. At least, we can put in a new waist."

Marjorie shut her lips rebelliously. She wanted to say generously that she didn't care. She could hardly stand against the unconscious appeal of mamma's tired shoulders and ruffled hair, her eyes strained from sewing. But how could she ever bear to stand up before the school in this dress that she knew was wrong! No. She would rather wear a sailor suit from Lombard's. That would be right, anyway. Lombard's, where she had gone with Mary Clark, on that funny little narrow street that felt of the sea. . . .

3

There was a delicious thrill of new intimacy in walking out beside Emily through the noisy station. But the home atmosphere was still so close around her that she felt a sud-

den fearful distrust of this new year. Emily's voice and thin hands were all that made the door of one of the three tall, attached red-brick houses on a little side street, her door. Emily's hands were accustomed as she fitted in the key. She introduced Marjorie to the landlady, who had a thin New England face and eye-glasses. Marjorie followed Emily up the two flights of stairs.

Emily was eager and used to things as she opened the bureau drawers and showed Marjorie the empty hooks in the closet. But it was all strange to Marjorie—the room with its big old-fashioned dresser and imitation mantel, its look of having had many people live in it. As she looked out of the window, and saw the other windows with milk-bottles and butter-jars on the sills, her heart sank. Aunt Bessie said that she was afraid of rooms when she didn't know who had been in them before. Marjorie and Emily wanted to be Bohemian. But Marjorie had always been seeing a little studio with window-boxes and gay flowered curtains and an open fire-place . . . away up on a top floor, with a low ceiling, and beautiful shadowy corners. She thought of 72 St. John Street, with the fire in the living-room, and the girls coming down to tea. But, of course, they were free now. And mamma wouldn't let her stay in any place that wasn't well-heated.

She kept close to Emily as if there were protection and compensation in that beloved face with the hazel eyes. She tried feverishly to respond to Emily's quick, eager suggestions. But it was all forced; and her eyes looked hunted and pathetic.

"Well, shall we seek food?" Emily asked abruptly.

"All right," Marjorie said faintly. She went into the closet and stood there putting on her hat and coat, to hide the tears that had suddenly come into her eyes.

They walked silently down an old-fashioned street, more conglomerate and shoddy than the ecclesiastical quiet of St. John Street. The houses were a dingy red, with turrets, and had meal cards in the windows.

Emily had a meal ticket at one of these houses. A man with a wooden leg sat in a dark smelly hall with linoleum on the floor, and punched the tickets. Marjorie was upset from her journey. She had a horrid feeling of sickness that she tried to hide from Emily.

Emily led her through the front room, with its four big tables, to an inner room. It had been the dining-room of the old dwelling and had a black marble fire-place. They had to sit at a long table with four Japanese students. Marjorie hated the food, and the dingy boarding-house way. The boiled potatoes had dark places.

But when they went out into the autumn dusk, the two girls seemed to find each other again. The brick houses did not look so dingy in the twilight, through which pricked the exciting city lights and sounded the cries of the newsboys. That same old lame man was selling roasted chestnuts on the corner, and the warm scent of the smooth brown shells and meaty kernels was good. It was glorious to be out on this city street with Emily. They could go anywhere they pleased, with no Miss Coleman to ask—could eat at tea-rooms, spend a day in Salem, go to see a lighthouse, and even "supe" with a Shakespearian company as Emily wanted to do.

Chapter VIII

I

"I DON'T see what difference it makes whether we have Miss Coleman or not," Marjorie said once to Emily. "We don't do anything."

"No, but I want to feel I can do something if I want to!" Emily said fiercely.

Mamma had kept repeating all summer: "I can't see why you want to give up all the lovely advantages you have at the Association!" But mamma did not understand how being with Emily meant more than all the other things. Marjorie seldom went to the Association now. Dorothy Stanley was in New York. During the summer, Dorothy had opened a gift shop in Maine; and now she was with a firm of interior decorators. Molly May had married a wealthy widower in Georgia. The charm of the Episcopalian atmosphere was gone.

With Emily she could share even the littlest things—even her liking for butter chocolates, and for the windows of Florentine shops. The school was different because she and Emily went together. The criticisms and disappointments, the tedium, were all lightened by the constant jesting sarcasm that they kept up. Waking in the morning, and shouting out the school favourites:

> **"Hark! Who calleth the maiden morn**
> **From her sleep in the fields and the stubble corn?"**

Emily turning over to shut off the alarm clock and intoning in the husky notes of Mrs. Courtwick:

> **"Hast thou a charm to stay the morning star**
> **In his steep course?"**

Rushing to school, late, against that fearful wind that almost whirled them around at the corner, Emily chanting:

> "One who never turned his back
> But marched breast-forward!"

Then there was the joy of "eating around," just as they pleased, indulging to the full her joy in tea-rooms and queer little eating-places. They went to the boarding-house only when they needed a substantial meal for little money; and they began to take delight in the very miscellaneousness of the clientele, with the Japanese students and the big man in Highland costume. Emily had made a rigid rule for herself that she could not spend more than ten cents for breakfast. She stopped in at a little dairy shop on Huntington Avenue, where she ate two corn cakes and a glass of milk, standing at the counter. She spent fifteen cents at noon. Marjorie was too loyal to spend more than Emily. And then they tried desperately to live through the late afternoon, when they had finished practising and could not exist another moment unless they got outdoors; when the sharp, smoky, late-autumn air, the noise in the streets, the lights just beginning to prick through the dusk, the mud that the wheels splattered . . . everything made them more hungry. They could not bear to pass the stand where the crippled man was roasting chestnuts, or to look into the shining window of the dairy place.

Emily clenched her hands. Her hazel eyes were fierce. "I will, *will* curb my appetite!" she moaned.

All of a sudden, her fierce self-control would break, she would stop in at a shoddy drug store and indulge in a chocolate-fudge marshmallow sundae which she bought for the very thickness of the fudge dressing with cornstarch. Then she would loathe herself—buying sundaes, when she couldn't even hear all the music that she wanted!

It was only when they went down town that they permitted themselves to eat in their favourite places—in French and Italian restaurants, places that would be "unusual."

Marjorie fell from grace more often. But she concealed it from Emily, partly from shame, partly from loyalty. There were always errands to do for people at home—buying Victrola records for Mrs. Phillips, or special kodak supplies for Bud. Guilty and joyful, she hurried down the wintry street, past the fascinating windows, to stop in at her favourite tea-room where she could be a leisured person of elegance. Sitting down in the little gilt chair, putting back her coat and pulling off her gloves, hearing the low-toned voices of women, choosing her favourite of the little cakes from the rose-coloured basket . . . she could not resist it.

And exploring—Emily said that she wanted to see everything in the world that there was to see. They wandered about the steep crooked streets behind the Capitol building and through the Italian quarter, went into old book-stores and bird-fanciers' shops; even into pawnshops, because Emily said relentlessly that they must "see life." Emily hinted darkly: "I may have to know about such places sometime. I don't intend to teach." Marjorie was flushed with horror, with distaste for the pawnbroker's fat shiny hands and furtive eyes, for the shoddy look of the jewellery. But she tried to conceal her feeling for Emily, who would be scornful, and say that she'd better go back to Buena Vista.

They went to readings by poets, meetings of the Drama League, anarchists' meetings in a big barren hall. These sounded exciting and daring; and Marjorie hid her dislike of the pale foreign-looking men with lank black hair and greenish-sallow skin and red neckties, who were always popping up and asking the speaker questions. She and Emily bought the pamphlets on sex and atheism, because these things ought to be respected as "new"; and Emily doggedly read them all, because she intended to read everything. It was fun to write home about these meetings—but always taking pains to say that there had been a very interesting speaker. Marjorie wanted mamma to be shocked and to protest, and the boys to deride—but not too seriously. It seemed to her that the doctrines were right, and yet she

loathed the people. If she accepted the doctrines, she would have to live in some dreadful place with dirty sheets and never again choose dainty little cakes from a rose-coloured basket. Suffrage meetings, lectures on science, spiritualist séances, talks on the New Thought by a smiling, silvery-haired woman with a big bosom who held a pink rose in her hand and called the audience "Now, dearies"; every art exhibition that they could find, in spite of long street-car rides (they actually met an artist himself—he talked to them —he had lived in Chile!); one-act plays which seemed more "artistic" than longer ones. They stood in line for symphony concerts; and Marjorie sold her old suit at a dingy second-hand shop so that she and Emily could both hear Kreisler.

They kept note-books in which they carefully printed in India ink (underlining the titles with red) the verse that they most cherished. A shiver of delight went through Marjorie when she wrote down words all steeped in a distant, glamorous beauty. The lyrics of Herrick and Shakespeare, and the new things, in *Poetry*, that had about them a marvellous freshness like a painting not yet dry.

Emily kept the poems of Emily Brontë sacredly apart from all others; and her copy of *Wuthering Heights* in a special place in the shelves. Emily made bitter comments on the little town in Colorado where her father was preaching. But she loved the plains and the mountains. That hazel fire kindled in her eyes when she read anything about the mountains. She had worked one summer, for a little while, in a hotel in Estes Park. She kept on the wall near her side of the dresser, as if in a shrine, a kodak picture of the twisted trees at timber-line. Emily had spent a night out of doors, all alone, in the mountains. Marjorie felt hurt and far away, sometimes, because Emily kept secret and apart her life in the mountains, so different from the life that they had together. When Marjorie was reading or writing letters, Emily sat hunched up on her cot writing with careful precision in a little five-cent note-book. But she would

never show this note-book to anyone, or speak about it. . . . None of the girls thought Emily pretty, although some of them admired her. Dorothy Stanley had said that she would be "dashing" in the right clothes. But there was a fire, a vitality, in her hazel eyes. Her mouth, when she was moved, quivered to a lovely sensuous curve. Her face was slightly haggard; but at moments there were beautiful red-gold lights in her hair. Although Emily took great care of her own person, she was careless and indolent about other things. She did not have enough clothes, did not look after her underwear and stockings—and there was no Aunt Bessie to do it for her. At school, she was awkward and silent among the other girls; and then it was Marjorie who led. Emily scorned men. She said they wanted only one thing of women—they expected all women to chime in and be "charming." Men only wanted women for accompanists, Emily said disdainfully, and she didn't intend to spend her life accompanying even the Emperor of China. Free love might be all right, if it was "a great love affair," among artists; but if you married and settled down, that was the end of you. Emily made fun of the little man with the moustache, who asked Marjorie to go to dances; and Marjorie sadly concealed her old dream of the fair young man with the brier pipe. But when that boy at the Academy who was studying to be an actor stopped them and talked to them in the corridor, Emily stood aside, flushed and rigid, and then was gay and talkative afterwards.

Aunt Bessie sent them money that spring to visit Plymouth, because she did not think it right for Marjorie to leave the East without having seen Plymouth Rock. They took their own lunch, buying all their favourite things for it—olive and nut sandwiches, potato chips from the delicatessen, mocha cakes, big red apples, and a box of butter chocolates. They played that they were Jane Austen people, "exploring," and called the train the "barouche-landau."

But Jane Austen did not fit in with Plymouth, with their "exploring" among old tombstones and along the beach.

The day was just the one for which they had been waiting. The sky and the sea were intensely blue, and little curls of white edged all the waves. The old buildings had their white, austere, Puritan look.

They stayed down near the beach for a while, so that Marjorie could take a kodak picture of Plymouth Rock for Aunt Bessie. But Emily liked it best in the old burying-ground. The grass was just coming green and tender through the withered, last year's tangles. The wide clean blue of the sky, the fresh saltiness of the air, purified the place of grimness and gave it a silent beauty. It was delicious to feel young, and close to each other, as they wandered about reading the bitter verses on the old sunken tombstones.

"Why couldn't we have been here when it was all wild!" Emily said impatiently. "People always spoil places."

"Well, we're people."

"Oh, I know it," Emily answered lightly. "But I never mean *us* when I talk about people."

"Anyway, I can't hold out much longer without a butter chocolate."

"Oh, butter chocolates fit in gloriously!"

They found a spot on the hill-side where they could eat their lunch. The feeling of the sea was all about them—not grim to-day, but pure and beautiful.

"*Margie,* how blue!" Emily breathed. "I adore it. I worship it. I could eat it all up, and still love it."

"Oh, Emmy Reever, you're awful!"

"I can't help it, I simply worship it," Emily moaned. "Hand me a chocolate quick and I'll eat that. Or wait—I've got a surprise."

She reached mysteriously into her bag and took out a package of cigarettes. "There! Women smoke them in England. I don't intend to stop doing *any*thing because I'm a girl." Marjorie did not know how to keep the smoke from getting in her eyes. But she could hold the cigarette out, between her fingers, and watch the faint blue curl of

smoke. Emily smoked resolutely, scowling when she had to cough.

When they had eaten, they lay and looked out across the waves where the water dazzled and deepened to a great core of purple darkness at the centre. They got out their books from Marjorie's Boston bag. Emily had brought *Dauber* and Marjorie a book of Christina Rossetti.

> **Why did you die when the lambs were cropping?**
> **You should have died at the apples' dropping,**
> **When the grasshopper comes to trouble,**
> **And the wheat fields are sodden stubble**
> **And all winds go sighing**
> **For sweet things dying.**

The faint, exquisite saltiness of the air, the blue spread of the sea, the memory of the toppling stones on that seaward hill high against the sky, made a beautiful background to the words. Christina Rossetti. There was something crystal about these verses, something like early rain, a sweet music with a sad exquisite dying away.

They kept their precious box of butter chocolates between them, eating slowly to make the candy last.

2

They had come to a conclusion about readers. Acting was straight, Emily said. But for readings, people gave things like *The Spell of the Yukon.* You spoiled the beautiful things if you tried to make them "effective." Of course, there was coaching plays, and being the secretary of a Little Theatre organization. But the Chautauqua was dreadful. And Lyceum work—Emily made a face. "Wear a dirty evening dress with a swishy train and give a program of Riley!" Beautiful poems should be read as much as beautiful songs should be sung. But even when she became a poet, Emily said she would not wear an evening dress with floating draperies and do her hair low on her neck and go about to Women's Clubs reading her own verses.

"Oh, I suppose we'll both end up with teaching!" Emily said bitterly. "Only I'm going to starve before I do it."

If she did have to teach, it would be in some "wild" place where she would be getting "experience." The poetry magazine which she bought eagerly each month had groups of poems in free verse, "interpretations" of the Chinese, Japanese, South American, and Hopi Indian poetry; and if she went somewhere far away, and saw things, she could write. She looked up civil-service examinations to learn whether there was any chance of getting to Porto Rico or the Hawaiian Islands. She wrote down a list of places in her notebook:

China
South America
Mining towns
Alaska (Valley of a Thousand Smokes)
Mexico

If she could only do something different! Ship as a stewardess on a boat to South Africa, take up a homestead in Wyoming, or go to Thibet! She called once to see a Baptist missionary who was just back from China. But she came back scornful.

"That awful woman! I don't see why all the women that go as missionaries have those dreadful huge mouths and protruding teeth. She asked me if I 'enjoyed working with the young people'!" Emily gave an angry smirk. "She wanted to know if I'd kept up my church work while I was in Boston, and talked about the 'wonderful opportunities' in the foreign quarters! Being patronizing to Italians, who know more about music than we do! I couldn't stand all the missionary business thrown in, even in China."

Marjorie wanted something "different" and "interesting" too. She concealed her fears of dirty sheets, and cooking in frying-pans. She looked up the schools that were advertised in the best magazines, picturing herself as the favourite young teacher at the boarding-school, always perfectly

dressed, and going to Europe in the summer. "Beautiful location among the healthful Blue Ridge Mountains. Music. Horseback riding. General Culture." A Southern city would be different—Baltimore or Charleston. There would be a scent of magnolias and white roses. She thought how well it would sound at home—"Oh, she's teaching Expression in a very exclusive girls' school in the South."

Perhaps, Emily said, they could go to New York together and "risk it." Find work in a book-store or a publishing-house where they would see authors. They could act in a Little Theatre.

Mamma wrote:

"No doubt New York would be very interesting to be in. But papa and I both feel that we have spent all this money giving you your training, and now you should make use of it. Papa says he does not see what you could get to do in a publishing-house and certainly after all the lovely training that you have had you do not want to be a clerk. Are you sure that Emily has the very best influence over you?"

Marjorie went into the bathroom so that Emily would not see that she was crying, and stood there looking out tragically across the dingy court. Emily could talk of being independent and doing what *she* thought and not what other people thought. But Emily had only a stepmother—she did not have mamma and Aunt Bessie. Would Marjorie really want Mrs. Phillips, and Neva and Mrs. Cole, to know that she was clerking—when so much had been expected of Marjorie Schoessel? Papa had given her this training.

"The folks won't let me go to New York," she said disconsolately to Emily.

Perhaps she could have a children's hour in a department store and tell fairy-tales. Or get up pageants—she saw them in an Elizabethan blur of scarlet and green and gold.

She felt now the strain of breaking away from mamma and papa. She knew, under all that she said, that they wanted her at home. She knew it, when mamma's letter came.

"Mamma has some bad news for you. Rich and Eva are married. They drove to Wahseta and were married yesterday by the minister there. Papa and I are feeling very badly because they said nothing to us. Rich is going to take over the garage in Oak Grove, so that we feel that we have lost him. Rich is papa's oldest son, and papa had always hoped that he would go into business with him. However, we would have been willing to give him the technical training which his fine talents should have had. Bud is going to school next year. Dear little fellow, I cannot believe that he is old enough. So that we will be all alone unless we can have our little girl again."

She skipped wildly, her heart sinking . . . "since you have no definite plans . . . do not want to worry you, but mamma has not been very well . . . dear Grandma's death . . . will not mean giving up your work . . . fine plan for you . . ."

It was all over. She and Emily would be apart. But only for a year—they would both save money, and then do something "interesting" together.

"Will you go to Alaska?" Emily demanded fiercely.

"Yes, I'll go to Alaska."

"Will you go to England by steerage?"

"Yes," Marjorie stoutly promised.

But when she talked of the steerage, she saw the fresh white curtains in her room, the sweet cleanliness . . . the smell of warm cake in the kitchen when she had come tiptoeing in after school, and lifted the cloth, and scraped up with her little finger the pearly bits of frosting that had run over on to the dish.

3

Most of the regular students had left when the dramatic term opened. The studios were filled with a strange influx of school-teachers, graduates, public readers, even two or three actresses. A teacher of Public Speaking from Texas had charge of the general work of rehearsals, although Mrs. Courtwick still gave criticism. He was always carefully addressed as "Dr. Pattey." He was a Doctor of Philosophy from a denominational school in Texas.

There was that feeling of enlivenment that goes with amateur theatricals. The hours were changed, too, and this made everything seem new and different. Play groups were meeting in every room. All the windows were open. The warm, soft, relaxing spring air stirred faintly. The little boys who had held out wet cool masses of trailing arbutus were gone from the street corners; but daffodils were out. Even here, in the studios, there seemed to be lovely spring odours of soft damp earth and young leaves.

It had been impossible to give a recital—although mamma and Mrs. Phillips had expected it, had even talked of coming East to hear it. But mamma had agreed to the Dramatic Term instead. Now they could study what they pleased—even one-act plays. Emily had chosen *Riders to the Sea.* Mrs. Courtwick had praised it in rehearsal, but had said that it was "not practicable" for the recital night. Dr. Pattey had praised it too. But he himself, he said, liked classical things. There was nothing like Shakespeare, after all. Dr. Pattey, for some occult reason, fancied himself as a comedian; and he had chosen Marjorie to play Titania to his Bottom in a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

A last she was taking her rightful place in the school, Marjorie thought exultantly. Even if Emily did scorn Dr. Pattey, if she did prefer something modern. Mamma and papa—even Mrs. Phillips—could understand and approve of this. Mamma sent a clipping from the Buena Vista paper:

Friends of Miss Marjorie Schoessel, who is a student at the Boston Academy of Expression, will be pleased to learn that Miss Schoessel has been chosen as the recipient of dramatic honours. She has been selected to play the part of Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* which will be enacted by the members of the Academy in their annual dramatic recital. This honour will not surprise the friends of Miss Schoessel who remember her fine rendering of *If I Were King* in the District Declamatory Contest of a few years back. Thus another of Buena Vista's daughters is receiving recognition from the powers higher up.

It was headed:

BUENA VISTA GIRL HAS LEADING ROLE IN BOSTON PLAY.

Of course B. T. Patterson, who edited the *Chronicle,* would write something like that! This little program, and Dr. Pattey—still, she was willing, and secretly a little pleased, to have people in Buena Vista think that she was making an imposing success in Boston.

She was to have a new dress for the recital—to choose whatever she wanted, and send the bill to papa. She wandered with Emily through the thickly-carpeted salesrooms. The clear frosty colours of the taffetas made her catch her breath with sharp delight. For a moment, she thought grandiloquently of having a train, and then appearing with it in Buena Vista.

A saleswoman with white hair strolled up. "I should like to see some evening dresses, please." Marjorie felt very elegant as she and Emily sat in small chairs waiting to have the gowns held up before them. The saleswoman, careless at first, became fondly respectful when she saw that Marjorie would buy an expensive dress.

"Oh, with your colouring—you're so fortunate! Isn't she? She could wear the yellow shades *beau*tifully. Couldn't she?"

The saleswoman gave Emily the part of admiring chorus. She kept appealing. "Doesn't that look sweet on her? Isn't that becoming?"

But Marjorie knew that the pink dress was hers as soon as it was brought out. The dear little bodice, like those the pretty maids had worn in an old illustration for *Mistress Mary*—the puffed skirt and the tiny puffed sleeves—it was the kind of dress she had always dreamed of wearing. She felt herself in a trance of loveliness when the taffeta, so crisp and yet soft, was pulled gently over her head and shoulders, as she felt the slimsy delicacy of the fine silken lining against her bare chest. She went out of the fitting-booth to show Emily.

"Oh, I like it!"

"Do you really?"

Marjorie stared into the long mirror, raising slowly one

hand and then the other, as the saleswoman turned to Emily for response to her enthusiasm. "Wasn't that simply made for her? Oh, that's her dress—no doubt of it!" Her arms were slender below the tiny puffed sleeves. The lovely full skirt with its frosty shine floated out softly below the pretty bodice. There was not a thing wrong with this dress —it was right from neck to hem! . . . "Our fair Queen!" Dr. Pattey would say.

Emily could not have a dress. She would have to wear the old white dress that she had been wearing for evenings all year. Emily's play had been the best of all. The others had been sticks, of course—dreadful. They had not known what they were doing. But nothing in the whole term had really been so good as Emily's acting—she knew it. Emily's fierce intensity—creating on that little platform, with those stiff actors, the feeling of the sea . . . of the low wet land, thorn-trees blown by the wind . . . And now she was to be in the recital, and not Emily. With a desire to somehow make amends, she begged Emily to go with her to her favourite tea-room—down the little white stairs to find a snug place in the white settle, to choose nut cakes from the pretty basket and drink chocolate from flowered cups.

Dr. Pattey's play was to be the *tour de force* of the Dramatic Term. The rehearsals were announced at the Morning Exercises; and Dr. Pattey was much put out if the janitor did not have the chairs ranged against the wall and the desk wheeled aside. The rehearsals were enlivened by frequent disagreements between Dr. Pattey and Mrs. Bagley, an old actress with a ravaged face and haggard neck who was trying to teach now that acting engagements were hard to get. She spoke in biting terms of Dr. Pattey to whoever would listen. "Little Texas schoolteacher. Excuse me, girls, for saying it—maybe you don't like to hear words like these, do you?—but what the hell does he know about acting? Ain't that so now?" She derided the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,*

although she always said ingratiatingly to Marjorie: "I don't want you to think I mean you, dearie. I think you and your friend are just fine for not being professionals. If your friend'd fill out her neck a little, I shouldn't wonder if she'd really make good on the stage." Dr. Pattey, and a Public Speaking teacher from North Dakota, who acted the part of Peter Quince, were the only professionals in the cast. A lively little Jewess with plucked eyebrows was to play Puck, and Oberon was a tall girl from Arkansas with a deep voice and a Southern accent. Mrs. Bagley played the part of Flute.

The term went breathlessly fast. The fairies and attendants marshalled at the last moment had to be drilled to remember their places. "Right hefty fairies," the girl from Arkansas said. Dr. Pattey became disturbingly approving of "Our Fair Queen"; and he kept Titania's hand in a fond pressure while he issued directions, from his flowery couch, to the rest of the company.

The studios had an exciting, theatrical feeling on the night of the recital. Girls were dressing in the large classroom where Mrs. Wales had taught, where the walls still echoed with the stentorian tones of *King Robert of Sicily*. It was full of coats and hats and scattered garments. Girls were sitting in corners, changing their shoes. Little narrow, thin-soled slippers lay on the floor. Mrs. Courtwick permitted the costumes to be only "suggested," but the girls were making the most of this permission. Mrs. Bagley was putting on make-up for them at the long mirror, and scolding. "How does she think I can make them up right? But if I put on any more, I suppose she'll make me take it off again. You can't argue with her. These make-ups ain't going to look like anything."

Marjorie slipped off her coat in an inconspicuous corner. She felt the floating loveliness of her taffeta dress as she came softly forward toward the light. She was Titania—Our Fair Queen. Everyone had recognized, and acknowledged, at last, that she had "the lyric touch—very rare."

The girls crowded about and touched her dress admiringly.

"Look at Titania! Isn't she going to be the loveliest thing?"

"If I could just make you up the way I want to!" Mrs. Bagley cried. "I'm going to let that hair down anyway. Girls—look at the length of that! Don't you ever go and rough up that hair, dearie, or you'll be sorry when you get as old as I am. I had hair longer than yours once. It come clear to my knees. I was offered fifty dollars for it once—but I wouldn't cut it off. I guess you wouldn't think it now!" She stuck her fingers despairingly into her coarse, dyed, reddish mat.

Marjorie had a swift exultant glimpse of herself in the glass, with the little wreath of flowers that Mrs. Bagley had put on her hair, and her eyes larger with the black lines below them.

"Now, if she makes you take off those flowers—girls, I tell you there'll be a rumpus!"

"I think it's mean she won't let me wear tights!" the little Jewess mourned.

But she found consolation in prancing about and tormenting people, in the character of Puck.

The buzzing in the room died into quick silence as Mrs. Courtwick entered. But even she was genial to-night. She permitted the flowing hair, nodding with a smile, slightly grim, of humorous comprehension.

"I guess she wasn't going to make that beautiful hair go up!" Mrs. Bagley snorted indignantly, when she had left. "They got the funniest ideas of costumes around this place!"

The girls came out of their attitudes of frozen attention. There was a quivering, giggling excitement in the room. "Feel my hands—feel how cold they are!" A thin little fairy with an extremely Southern accent begged piteously to have her few little lines heard.

> **"Weavin' spiduhs, come not heah:**
> **Hince, yo' long-legg'd spinnuhs, hince!**

Honey, tell me, do you-all think I do it all right?"

"Sh! It's beginning."

The scene from *The Rivals* came first. The girls, huddled together in the classroom, listened with nervous eagerness to the distant voices, the mysterious laughter, the applause. Dr. Pattey tiptoed about the rooms. His scene came last —the climax of the program.

There was no curtain for the large platform in the front studio that was being used for a stage. The fairy band crowded upon it, the attendant sprites crushed painfully back against the wall, one of them even relegated to the platform steps, where she stood on one foot with agonized airiness. Marjorie was aware of the complacent, lifted faces of the audience. She had a moment of wanting to break into wild laughter at the sight of Dr. Pattey, booming and ponderous as Bottom, at Mrs. Bagley acting tremendously as Flute. Then there came that wonderful calmness and ease that she had felt in the overflow meeting at Forest Bluffs—only more transcendent. Her movements flowed softly, and she heard her voice coming sweet and clear with its own best quality. It was this that she had wanted—this moment. She was both herself and the Fairy Queen. It was for this that she had come to the Academy.

She left the stage lightly, her cheeks hot and her eyes bright, conscious of the girls pressing her hands as she passed, of the approving face of Mrs. Courtwick. Emily helped her put on her wraps in the classroom. She would never see Mrs. Wales here again, slapping her great chest and making them all expand and shout:

"'Make way for liberty!' he cried."

Her work in the Academy was over. She would not have to fear Mrs. Courtwick again. The things that she had dreamed of had not happened . . . and yet this night was as it should have been, she had always known that it would come. Mrs. Courtwick and all the girls had praised her, had "recognized" her. And although there had been no fair

young man in perfect evening dress—sometimes smooth-shaven, sometimes with a small fashionable moustache—sitting rapt in admiration in the audience, and sending roses, Dr. Pattey was waiting near the elevator, as if by chance, to walk home with her and Emily. Absurd as Dr. Pattey was, with his fond handclasps and his pomposity—and with "Mrs. Pattey and our three little sons" in Texas—still, it was his attentions, his preference, that gave the final, necessary glory to her evening.

PART IV

Chapter I

I

THE excitement of the recital night still coloured everything. Even if she was going home with nothing really decided. She squirmed away from the thought of what mamma's "plan" might be, dreamed vaguely of an outdoor theatre in that lovely pasture south of town, of telling fairy-tales to entranced children . . . saving enough money to go to London with Emily next year.

She thought enviously, a little fearfully, of Emily's boldness—tearing up that contract from the school in Oklahoma just after she had signed it, getting that job as nursemaid to the three children on Commonwealth Avenue, declaring that as soon as she had saved forty dollars she was going to New York. Emily was still in Boston. She could walk out along the Esplanade, see all the queer old men with silk hats and umbrellas, and the homely Boston women with dreadful hats and refined voices and ground-gripper shoes; go into the Amber Room in the Museum, where the chunks of honey-coloured amber were beautiful and warm and clear in the midst of the dark carved wood. But when she and Emily had each saved two hundred dollars, they would go somewhere together.

She knew what the boys would say. "Yes, I see Marge saving money! I see her taking any kind of job that turns up! I see her doing anything that doesn't just exactly suit her!" Papa would say, with mild significance: "Well, I'm glad to hear you're beginning to save, Margie. You've never been very strong in that line so far." Both papa and mamma said how extravagant she was: with towels, laun-

dry, soap, money, talcum powder—everything. It had been a standing complaint against her as long as she could remember. But she would do anything to go to London with Emily. . . . She moved uneasily, jerked her hand away from the window-sill, as she thought suddenly of how it would be at home. People would expect her to read for them, and would ask sweetly: "Do you know any of Riley?" But she could feel her home drawing her reproachfully. That was something that she couldn't explain to Emily—something always holding her back when they talked about going to "wild" places.

But this time, as she crossed the Mississippi and knew that she was at home, in Iowa, again, there was none of that exaltation of home-coming that she had felt last spring. The train drew into Buena Vista. It was just the same—the clustered summer trees, the little station with the three-cornered park and the iron railing. Papa and mamma need not think that she would stay here.

Her mother and Bud were at the station with the car. Bud was working this summer on a farm that papa had bought north of town, but he had come in to-day.

Marjorie exclaimed: "Why, Bud Schoessel! I hardly knew you! Is that *you?*"

"Sure," Bud said grinning, proud and a little shamed.

He had grown taller and slimmer, and only his bright eyes with the drooping lids, and the funny little point that his hair made in the back, were like Bud. He looked like Rich now—had even a queer suggestion of Uncle John and Grandpa Blossom. She could not believe that that deep voice belonged to Bud. He had stayed a little fellow so long—wearing short trousers long after the other boys in his class were grown-up and taking girls to dances. And now all at once he had shot up into a young man!

There was an elderly shabbiness in the tree-lined streets. Last year this had not mattered, but now Marjorie had an uneasy feeling of being committed to it. Mamma had on her black spring hat and a summer voile dress, no gloves.

Marjorie saw everything with an undercurrent of criticism; even mamma's hand, slender, dark and a little worn, that lay fondly on hers.

They stopped at the store on the way home. Papa and Hummer were in the yard unpacking some crates. She noticed even more than she had last summer how papa looked . . . seedy . . . his coat unbuttoned, his shapeless trousers with a few shreds of excelsior sticking to them, his hat pushed back on his head. He was wearing glasses. Even Hummer looked old. She saw grey in his oily brown hair which he still parted in the middle, although those two long curving front locks no longer hung to his eyebrows. His teeth were yellow and one of the prominent ones was gone. Even Hummer could change—he was not just a part of the store, after all.

Old Buster came out to meet the car, began to circle and jump at the sight of her. Oh, yes, it *was* beautiful to be at home. Marjorie knelt down, leaning her cheek against his rough coarse head and murmuring comforting words. He had hurt his paw last winter and was a little lame. He was old, of course—the oldest dog in town, except for that ancient terrier that belonged to Mr. Bishop and that people were saying "ought to be put away." Her dear old Buster —she hugged him remorsefully.

The house needed paint dreadfully. But she couldn't say anything about it, and she reproached herself angrily for noticing it. They had given her that beautiful dress and the extra money for the Dramatic Term.

"Look up in your room," mamma said eagerly.

The Circassian walnut dresser was just as she had left it last fall. But there were new rose-pink drapes at the windows—her own colour.

"Do you like them?" mamma, who had followed her upstairs, was asking. "Your old curtains would hardly have gone through another washing. And mamma wanted your room to look nice when you came home. Aunt Bessie's making something for you, too. But she couldn't get it

finished, for Grandpa takes so much care now. I'll tell you—but you must let Aunt Bessie think you're surprised when she sends it to you. She's making a valance and bolster for your bed of the same material as the drapes. Just like the bed we saw in the model bedroom in that new department store in Wahseta."

Mamma went downstairs to see about the supper, cheerful and happy because Marjorie was at home. If only they hadn't done over the room! It meant that they expected her to stay.

Marjorie leaned against the window-frame, looking out at the lawn. The lovely freshness here was something that belonged to mamma and Aunt Bessie and Grandma Blossom. She thought of her rooming-house, of the bathroom with the old-fashioned tin tub and the horrid little wad of damp blond hair that that woman on the second floor was always leaving on the edge of the washbowl. There was no dingy court outside her window now—only the wide summery lawn where the grass was rich and good-smelling. Even the big barn had a kind of gracious pleasantness, standing there in the low sunlight of the late afternoon. But it was lonely—the quietness, the long empty stretch of the road under the tall trees. Why hadn't she decided something before she came away from Boston?

She missed Rich at the supper table. The family was getting smaller. To-morrow Bud would have to go back to the country again. But after supper he hung around the kitchen in his old way, making confidences while she was putting away the dishes. The Seniors had had a "skip day" this spring—had all cut school and gone to the woods for a Wiener roast. Old Prosser had said he wouldn't let any of them graduate, and there had been all kinds of a row. Some of the fathers had talked to him—"Gee, he couldn't keep a whole class from graduating! He just thought he'd make a big bluff and scare us."

After they had left the kitchen, Bud scuttled upstairs and later came down with very slick hair and a clean shirt.

"Where's he going?" Marjorie demanded.

"Why, to see Marian! He goes to see her every night when he's in town. *We* never see anything of Bud any more! I wonder they can stand to be separated as much as they are. Well," mamma said, with a little sigh, "Marian's a very nice girl. She would make Bud a good wife."

"Wife!" Marjorie exclaimed in horror. "Those kids!"

"Well, they've been going together for over a year now. Bud's grown up a lot this last year—all that crowd has."

They took chairs out to the porch. Papa was too tired to get out the car again to-night. He had had to make a long drive into the country that morning. The lawn was wet with heavy summer dew, and the trees were big in the dusk. It was lovely, lovely . . . but she was through school now, something ought to happen right away, her real life begin . . . and the quietness made her afraid. Mamma tried to make out who was passing. It was strange to be here with just papa and mamma, not to have some of the girls coming in. There was a loneliness sitting here in the summer night, watching the lights of the cars that sped past. The fragrance of the wet flowers was heavy.

She listened dreamily, half reluctant, while mamma told her of the changes. Neva and Mrs. Cole liked it so well in California that they didn't want to come back. People wouldn't be surprised to hear that Mr. Cole was selling out. Kat was expecting a baby. "I bought a nice little baby pillow in Wahseta that you can embroider for her if you want to, Margie. She wants you to go over and see her things." Jessie was still working in the telephone office. "It seems too bad. She's such a bright girl. But I suppose they need her help." Mr. and Mrs. Phillips had been in Florida during the winter, and were in Atlantic City now. Mrs. Phillips had had some fine letters in the *Chronicle* describing St. Augustine and Palm Beach, and she was thinking of having them published in pamphlet form for her friends.

"Mr. Williamson has a class of girls he wants you to take, Margie."

"Oh, mamma! You didn't tell him I would!"

"Why, I think it would be nice for you now that you are at home again."

2

Marjorie knew as soon as she took the letter out of the mail-box what it was, although it came from a little Conservatory in Mississippi about which she had almost forgotten—to which she had only written because it was in the South, in a town called Evening Shade. None of the schools with romantic names had replied—Rosemary Hall, or Warwick-in-the-Pines, or The Mansion. The moment had come now, just as "the moment" came in books. Perhaps the letter would decide it for her, she would not have to break away herself from all that she loved here—from the lawn where the tall trees were so leafy now, from the fresh cool morning scent of the vines on the porch.

She fled upstairs with her letter and shut the door before she tore open the envelope with her manicure scissors. The Conservatory wanted her to teach Elocution and English—"a few other classes, if necessary." The salary would be five hundred dollars a year with board and room and the privilege of having private pupils.

Old dreams of romantic elegance, of herself wearing a lace scarf and walking under the magnolias with a dark young Southerner in a wide-brimmed hat who had ridden over on horseback from his neighbouring estate, The Beeches . . . faded out before that uncompromising "Salary—$500." "Private pupils"—like Mrs. Shrader at Tubbs. But it would be going away. It would be experience. Certainly she could save two hundred dollars out of the five, if her board and room were paid . . . and then go somewhere with Emily, have lodgings together in London or an apartment in New York, spend a summer on the coast of

Brittany or in a thatched-roof cottage in Devonshire. Above everything else, she would not have to agree to mamma's "plan."

That "plan" had brought all her vague dreams of outdoor theatres and fairy-tales down to earth. Mamma could not see how dreadful it was, why it was just what she hated. Before mamma had told her what the "plan" was, she had been content to trust foolishly to it, to live in a kind of languor, to lounge through the afternoons reading some of her old favourites from the shelves (*Lorna Doone,* and the good parts of *David Copperfield*) and nibbling crackers; lost sometimes in the glow that still came with the remembrance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Not so much because she had been "going it so hard," as Mrs. Fitzpatrick wisely suggested, as from a sense of break, a let-down. She had unpacked her trunk, so absorbed in poring over the programs and pictures that she had saved, that she had let her clothes lie about in piles all around her. These things had about them already a beautiful melancholy of reminiscence. She had folded away her shimmering taffeta dress in the cedar chest. She had taken down the two sepia prints of *Cupid Awake* and *Cupid Asleep* that she had got years ago from the store, and put up the photograph of the Indian in front of the Museum at Boston that Emily had given her. Anne Jackson had watched her, admiring everything, exclaiming: "Oh, my, I think it's wonderful all you've seen!" How queer it had been to actually see famous paintings for the first time, not to think of them as just sepia prints or Perry Pictures any more! She, Marjorie Schoessel, had seen these things with her own eyes.

And then mamma had told her what the "plan" was. Uncle John had died last fall. The lease on his real-estate office had not run out, and her cousins, Ethel and May, had kept the rooms. They were selling music and records and Victrolas in one room, and had rented the other temporarily to a woman who had the Fair Lady corset agency. They wanted Marjorie to pay them cost rent for this room and

use it for a studio; May would give music lessons; and Ethel, who had learned a little folk dancing at the Y.W.C.A., wanted to work up children's classes in dancing. Mamma and papa were willing to pay the rent and all extra expenses until she got started. There was the room waiting for her, the girls ready to help her, and her name already known now in Wahseta. Mrs. Shrader was gone. The woman at Tubbs was not liked. Best of all, mamma and papa would have her near them. That was the heart of the whole matter—making mamma forget her anger with Aunt Clara for talking about Christian Science when Uncle John was dying of cancer. They could drive her back and forth in the car when the weather was good. And—who knew?—after a year or so, she might be doing so well that she could get a little coupé of her own and spend every night at home! . . . How could she ever make mamma understand how dreadful the "studio" would be?—to "work up classes" in Wahseta, toady for pupils, give popular recitals that would "take," read plays at the Woman's Club! Teaching in a school would be decenter, more honest.

Mamma could not see, either, why she did not want to spend a year in Buena Vista, much as she loved her home. All the girls were away, or working, or married. There seemed to be no one about for her but Anne. Even Chub Patterson was not here. Harry Ryan needn't suppose, because she went to some of the K.P. dances with him, that she could ever be interested in him! She could not be interested in any man in Buena Vista. That would spoil her shining future of Europe and travel and art and beauty. Percy Franklin was the only man in town who really cared about music and reading. But even Percy Franklin was behind the times and didn't know it. He wrote letters to the literary page of the Des Moines paper, protesting against new books and wondering why nobody wrote like Maupassant. . . . And yet, that treacherous clinging love of home, of the lawn, the flowers, every piece of furniture, pulled her back, held her.

But at least, she knew dimly, this letter would bring the studio plan to a crisis. Mamma had known that she had not been enthusiastic when they had driven over to Wahseta to look at the rooms; but Ethel had been so eager and excited, and mamma so sure that it was the very thing, that she had simply not been able to make objections. They were so intangible, anyway—Ethel, mamma and papa, none of them understood. She went slowly downstairs with the letter. Her mother was making tarts in the kitchen, dropping a bit of shining, wobbly, garnet-coloured jelly in the centre of each. It used to be such fun to beg for those dear little round pieces cut out of the tarts and to have them for cakes at tea parties in the maple.

"Mamma."

Mamma looked happy and absorbed, humming as she worked.

"Mamma. I got a letter from one of the schools I applied for."

Mamma looked up. "Well! But you aren't going to take it! Let me see the letter."

She waited while mamma rinsed her hands and dried them on the kitchen towel of soft huck.

"Mississippi! Away off there! Is that all the salary they can offer you with all your training?"

"It's better than nothing," Marjorie muttered petulantly.

"But you don't need to take any position," mamma said, bewildered. "I thought the studio was all arranged for!"

"Oh, mamma, I can't *stand* the studio!"

She hated Wahseta, couldn't bear to stay again with Aunt Clara and the girls, would rather teach *arithmetic* than have a studio. Mamma listened in amazement. Hadn't Marjorie wanted to go to a special school so that she needn't do regular teaching?—and now they had the very thing for her, and she refused it! Mamma had talked with the president of the Woman's Club, who said that there was a splendid opening; and Mrs. Phillips was going to write to Mrs. Maria Gurney Perkins, whom she had

met through club work, and try to get on the track of desirable pupils. And now suddenly, after all their trouble and planning, she wanted to give up her splendid chance and go down to Mississippi for five hundred dollars a year!

The question was not decided at dinner. Papa had only a few minutes to eat. Someone had died—"Oh, I wish people wouldn't always take it into their heads to die just when we're busiest!" mamma complained—and he and Hummer had to drive out to the country near Byron. But it all had to be gone over at supper time.

"Well, papa, *now* what do you think Margie's got in her head?" mamma asked despairingly.

They thought it was all her "fussiness." It hurt them when she said she did not want them to help her get started —that she wanted to do things for herself. When had they ever refused her the money that she needed?—there was the two-year course they had been so glad to let her have, and the extra Dramatic Term. And as for "cheap things," Mrs. Shrader certainly hadn't read cheap things! Mamma had heard her read *The Rubaiyat* at the Woman's Club—no one could expect to give nothing but Shakespeare!

"Yes, but Mrs. Shrader read it to *music*."

"But you don't have to read it to music—though I thought it sounded very nice. But that's just quibbling, Marjorie."

"I have to do lots of things I don't care for," papa said. "There wouldn't have been much training or anything else if I hadn't."

"And if you say you don't like Wahseta," mamma cried, "it's certainly better than a little town in Mississippi. It's much more backward down there. Mrs. Phillips says that in some towns in the South, they don't even have city water, and have to drink rain-water. Anyone as fussy as you are, Margie, would never stand that!"

She could not explain to them—not even to herself—why it was that she used to sit rigid with a dreadful shame when Mrs. Shrader walked slowly to the platform with a mystic

step, opened the manuscript on her reading-stand, and read verses from *The Rubaiyat* with trills and sudden poundings and soft music from the piano. None of it was real—only a word here and there. And it was the very artificiality, all the palaver, that made the ladies smile at one another with a congratulatory air and think that something impressive was being done. . . . But all the arguments came down to one thing. This school was so far away from home. She had been away from them for two years. They would be alone next year if she left them. How could they let her go again? . . . Mamma's thin shoulders, her little face, were drooping and pitiful as she went silently about the house, cooking the things that Marjorie liked and laying her clothes, all mended, upon the bed. Grandma had died, and Uncle John. Rich had married and gone away. How could she leave them, after all they had done for her, for a Conservatory in Mississippi?

But the struggle had one result. If she gave up the Conservatory, they would say no more about the studio. They would have to make some explanation to the girls, and to Mrs. Phillips—that she was tired out, or that mamma needed her at home. They could not understand why she should give up such a wonderful opportunity of making a real position for herself; but at least they would have her with them. Of course they knew that she would not be content to stay at home without something to do. They wanted her to make use of her training. Mamma saw no reason why she should not give lessons in her own home. Perhaps she could build up a studio there. Marjorie agreed. She had objected all that she could. Now she could say nothing even against the announcements that Mrs. Phillips thought should be sent out, although she hated including all those silly "testimonials" that sounded like things in almanacs. Mrs. Phillips insisted that she put in every bit of training that she had had—"Private Lessons with Helene Cuddiford Rexell, A.B., Franklin College"—

because all these things counted with people. The photograph of herself in her pink taffeta looked hard and commonplace, not like that soft new blurry kind of "portrait" that Dorothy Stanley had sent her. The photographer had ordered new furniture from the store not long ago, and papa said that she must patronize him. They went over the telephone book, Leland, Byron, Farmers' Exchange and all, and marked the names of those to whom announcements should be sent. Mrs. Phillips added the names of prominent women, club women or wives of State Senators, whom she knew in towns near by.

Mamma and papa said: "Well, it'll give her something to do and keep her contented. She ought to get her spending-money out of it, at least."

It would be better than Wahseta. There would be something—home, her room, her own dear place. People would want her to read the kind of things she hated, but her teaching could be honest. She could save every bit of money she earned for next year with Emily.

After the announcements were sent out, there were inquiries and telephone calls. But although these sounded promising, few of them seemed to turn out to be anything.

"You mustn't be discouraged," Mrs. Phillips said. "It always takes time to get started with anything." Mrs. Phillips was going to give a benefit program for the Red Cross, and she was to read at that.

Mamma's friends called, hoped she would make a success of it, asked how much she was going to charge and raised their eyebrows when she told them. There were letters from a woman in Oak Grove whose child had "remarkable talent," but who wanted to get lessons at a reduction. The high-school girls were interested, admiring the clothes that Marjorie had got in Boston just as she used to admire Frances Patterson's; but their parents thought that they got training enough, free, from the English teacher and that there was no use paying for lessons. The English

teacher was an enemy. She would not let pupils who were working for the declamatory contest get outside criticism, and she declared angrily that Marjorie had "come in here to get the high-school play away from her."

Little Dwight Patterson, who was "not quite bright" and could never keep up with his classes, was her most regular pupil. He learned patiently to say without stuttering: "Six thick thistle sticks," but he could never get much beyond that. Mrs. Phillips said that Marjorie was too conscientious about the lessons. She must give people what they asked for. It was no fault of hers if Mrs. Patterson preferred to call Dwight "delicate" instead of defective, and was too proud to send him to the proper school; or if that queer girl from the south part of town could never learn to speak decently, for all the voice lessons in the world, when she was afflicted with such a nose. "Oh, well, she'll get some good out of what you're giving her," mamma said consolingly. "And you aren't responsible for people's noses." One of the women to whom Mrs. Phillips had written came from Leland to get coaching in lodge work. She was perfectly certain of the expression, she said—she had always known how to get the expression—but she wanted a little help with the gestures.

The oddest fish that the announcements drew was the proprietor of the Buena Vista beauty parlour and bathing establishment, Miss Zelma Younglove. It was fun to write Emily about her—it made the studio sound like a dramatic, amusing thing from which she was getting experience. Miss Younglove was a big awkward woman with flat feet who came from the country near Byron. She did shampooing and chiropody and gave "health baths"; and, when business was poor, went out as a practical nurse. She had to gratify her desire to appear before the public by making long speeches at the Christian Endeavor society and by sending letters of complaint to the *Chronicle,* in which she described in ponderous and roundabout phrases the toilet

facilities of the town. Now she wanted Marjorie to "coach her" on dramatic selections in return for shampoos and health baths.

"Why, mamma, I can't do anything with her!" Marjorie said tragically. "Her voice is cracked."

"Can't you patch it up a little?" papa asked mildly.

"Oh, well, never mind," mamma said. "If she wants to speak, it won't do any harm to hear her. It might be nice for you to have the shampoos."

"I suppose you think it would be nice for me to have a *health* bath, too, and lose every bit of skin I've got!"

"No, no. Keep your skin," papa suggested gently.

It was dreadful to have Bud at home while these lessons were going on. She had tried to give Miss Younglove some of the school problems, hinting delicately that her voice needed training, but Zelma came with those frightful old dramatic selections she had chosen from the *Speaker*. Bud mimicked the lesson afterwards, Zelma's rendition and Marjorie's anxious suggestions and tactful agreements. "Br-r-rave Kate Shelley!" But he was remorseful, and followed her into the hall begging: "Aw, Marge—come on! Shoot! It was only Zelma I was talking about," when Marjorie flew into a passion of angry sobbing and locked the door of her room before he could reach her.

"You know she can't stand teasing about the lessons," mamma reproved him. "And listen to me, Bud—you're never to make fun of that girl's nose again, either. Margie takes all these things to heart."

People asked her to read, and she was torn between wanting to please them, to do what was expected of her, and to satisfy her own self. Mr. Prosser wanted her to give a program before the high school. Mrs. Fitzpatrick asked her to give a "missionary selection" at the Thank Offering meeting. The minister asked her to read Kipling's *If* at the Sunday night service, at which he was now having special programs to attract the young people. He was going to base his sermon on the poem. Mamma thought it would

not do to send bills to her pupils. They all knew her, and they would be offended. And of course she could not charge the Christian Endeavorers for coaching their farce—in which all the girls were eager for parts and the boys hung back sheepishly and said: "Aw, I don't want to be in that."

Of course papa and mamma gave her all the money that she needed for clothes and little things. But how was she going to get her two hundred dollars? What could she do at home to earn money?—unless she sold home-made candy at the store, or went around taking subscriptions for magazines. Emily had written that she would not have enough to go to London, either. Emily was clerking in a book-store in New York—seeing authors, talking with "well-known people." She wanted Marjorie to come and have a studio with her. Marjorie saw herself and Emily sitting before an open fire in a low-ceiled room with bookshelves. She saw herself in the book-store talking to a famous author, impressing him with her talent and charm, being asked to be his secretary.

But New York was so far away across those great prairie stretches. She dared not go with only thirty-five dollars, like Emily. There was a huge distance between herself and Emily that she despaired of ever crossing.

3

The little flurry of home-coming excitement had died down. The clothes she had bought in Boston were no longer new. People had heard all that she could do. A girl who had just come home from Chicago, where she had been studying music, was the one who was asked to perform everywhere. People began to call Marjorie up at the very last minute, or when someone else had failed. She thought with gloomy despair that some day she would be like Miss Roberts, who had gone away to study Elocution years ago and who used to read *Barbara Frietchie* on Decoration Day.

Now Miss Roberts scarcely stirred out of her little square brick house with the narrow wooden porch.

Mamma could not see why she did not want to learn dialect pieces when so many people asked for them. "You are so anxious to do something, but we've given you all this training in Expression and now you let it drop. Just the way you did with your music."

The social life of the town had become set and formal in a small way. People all seemed to do the same things—drive, shop in Wahseta, play cards, listen to Victrolas, attend clubs and lodges. Nothing could go on without organization—as if people looked to one another cautiously before daring to venture even on amusement. It had been different when she had had her own little crowd, within the limits of which she had lived with an eager intensity. Now she belonged nowhere. Not even in the club of business girls where Jessie was. She was only a girl at home with her mother—like Frances Patterson, who had also studied in the East and was now "just staying at home"; Frances Patterson, who had combed her hair the same way ever since she had been at school, and was afraid to shorten her skirts.

There was only Anne for companionship. Anne was a year and a half younger, and had always adored Marjorie's crowd. Marjorie had to get away from Anne sometimes. She went down town, especially on rainy days, when fewer people would come into the store. She put on her favourite Victrola records and sat listening and brooding, half soothing, half exciting her loneliness . . . going home in a daze of misery in which she could not bear the sight of the familiar sidewalks and the buildings she must always pass.

But she could not get along without the reassurance of Anne's admiration. Her old crowd was quite scattered. The high-school girls, those in Bud's crowd and the one a little younger, were asked to serve now at teas and parties and church suppers. Kat could talk about nothing but the baby. Neva and her mother spent all their winters in California and came home only for short summer visits.

Winnie was still in Buena Vista, living with her mother in their little house at the end of the street. It was said that Al Bronson was "running around with" Winnie, and that was why his wife had gone to California. One day, Anne and Marjorie saw a strange man coming toward them on the street, wearing tweeds and swinging a stick. When they got up to him, they saw that it was Louie Bassett. He still had his pink cheeks, and he was wearing a little downy moustache. He was doing feature work on a newspaper in the East, and the *Chronicle* had published a whole column about his success. He had been a dramatic critic and an art critic. He had come back to show people in Buena Vista that he needn't care about them any more. There was a hidden, studied insolence in his airy politeness when he stopped to talk for a moment. But it was right. She deserved nothing from Louie Bassett. Only that his light assumption of superiority angered her—he did not see that his clothes and manner were affected and overdone, and that he was showing off to Buena Vista while he thought that he despised it.

There was the lodge, and the church. She was at home, unattached, available. The minister "counted upon her." She was flattered because the crowd of girls who were just entering high school adored her, and would have no one else for their teacher. When she took them on picnics to Reeds Grove, and they fought to walk beside her, she would not let herself consider whether she "believed" or not. She must have something.

People went in little cliques, as the minister complained. The same group drove to Oak Grove or to the river together —the Schoessels and Fitzpatricks and Willises and Pattersons. Mamma always suggested that Anne be taken on these drives to "make company" for Marjorie. The two girls strolled along the bank of the river while the matrons got out the lunch or washed the dishes, Anne with her arm around Marjorie and leaning against her.

It was a relief when Anne couldn't go. The women sat

in one of the cars while the men fished. They held detailed discussions, in sleepy murmuring tones, of love affairs and family histories. Marjorie sat back in the car, idly watching butterflies, dreamily listening. Sometimes the women were embarrassed in a kind of pleased, superior way, used initials only, and said: "You wait until you get married, Margie, and you'll know what all this means." But the stories made life in Buena Vista more interesting—as if the threads were being drawn out of a big mixed-up pattern and held up before her.

She felt the pleasant homelike quality of the woods down by the river—the long shiny grass under the oaks, with the stumps and the blackened stones of old picnic fires; the clumps of catnip and yarrow; glimpses of cattle away off through the trees, moving leisurely; the shine of the river through the leaves of the scattered trees along the bank, and the faint distant voices of the men at their fishing. She wandered off by herself. Familiar as these woods were to her, there was always a strangeness about them: a feeling of timeless, dreamy solitude when she got beyond the sight and sound of the others . . . stood for a moment alone in the hot summer air, in a little open space ringed about with bushes of wild gooseberry, and straggling trees. A sense of beauty, for which there was no outlet, oppressed her. Then the picnic place where the older people were laughing shrilly—"Oh, that's what you were after, were you?—trying to make my hubby sit by you"—seemed what was strange and alien. She was glad to be alone . . . and then, standing there in the heat and stillness, she thought of the tall fair-haired young man whom she had pictured in so many different places.

She complained that there was nothing for her to do; and mamma and papa, anxious and bewildered, talked about a trip next summer. Papa said that she might help in the store. He needed someone to help with the books and make up the funeral bouquets. She learned to use the old

Remington there, thinking that if she went to Chicago or New York the knowledge of typing might help her to get work. She liked to talk to the country people who came in from miles around, who told about the state of the roads and predicted the weather. She graciously played the Victrola for wives who sat waiting for their husbands to get through their business at the produce house and the bank. Hummer, who went about whistling through his teeth as he unpacked boxes, still tried to tease her about Harry Ryan and Chub Patterson.

She saw, as if standing a little way off, the life that papa had in the store—the contacts, the intimacy, the knowledge of people, the sense of ownership. She might like it too if her life were settled, if all her clamouring needs had been satisfied. But she did not want to work at the store. She must justify herself, do what was expected of Marjorie Schoessel with all her advantages—something "interesting" and out of the ordinary—like keeping a gift-shop or a tea-room, taking charge of a girls' camp or the Junior work on the Chautauqua. It frightened her to feel how deeply she had grown into the daintiness, sweetness, security of home—so that now she feared she could never take up a homestead in Wyoming, or go to Europe by steerage, as Emily still wanted to do.

She had tonsilitis in the winter, and after that was thin and nervous, hated to eat, cried easily. Mamma anxiously tried to make her stay outdoors, to take long drives and walks with Anne. She begged Marjorie to see Dr. Mary Loomis, but Marjorie rebelled. Dr. Loomis thought that all that girls needed was to wear sensible shoes, drink plenty of water, and find some interest outside themselves.

She began to talk wildly about going to Chicago and "getting a job." Teaching would take her away from home, but it would do nothing else—somehow, it would be only marking time. She could find what she vaguely but ardently thought of as "something" in the city. Mamma and

papa did not see why she wanted to go to Chicago, it was such a dirty city. They could not have her tramp the streets looking for work. But at last they agreed to let her go there and take a summer course in physical training, upon the supposition that it would fit in with her training and help her if she wanted to teach.

Chapter II

I

MARJORIE hurried through the noisy streets, which were dark under clouds and coal smoke. She dreaded to ask for work, and she was still smarting with humiliation from the tactful, Y.W.C.A. helpfulness of the girl in the Bureau of Occupations. "I'll tell you, Miss Schoessel, frankly it seems to me that teaching is the very best thing you can do." She had sat there, feeling herself not an individual but only another of the eager women who flooded the city looking for "interesting" work, so that even her clothes had felt dingy to her; and she had left, conscious that the two women in the office were exchanging little whimsical frowns at her vagueness and inexperience, and passing her off as the latest case. They had known nothing about story-telling in department stores; but at last they had sent her to the office of a hosiery company where a filing clerk who could use the typewriter was wanted. She would not want the people at home to know what she was doing. But the harsh, huge, dirty buildings, the roar of the streets across which she had to run breathlessly, the constant rush of busy people who pushed ruthlessly past, would not let her wait.

She found the office—a little room on the eighth floor of an ugly smoke-grimed building several blocks beyond State Street. Her knees were weak, and she felt a sense of mysterious humiliation. She had talked so often at home, in those wild crises of dissatisfaction, about "getting a job somewhere." She had been angry and unconvinced when papa and mamma had asked sensible questions:

what could she really do, how would she be any better off? But it was not so easy when she came to do it, just as they had predicted. She turned the door-knob with assumed assurance, trying to control her breathing as she had been taught at the Academy. The room had bright new office furniture. But the view from the high windows was dingy and harsh.

She asked for Mr. Milhousen. The stenographer, who was alone in the little room, looked at her coldly.

"Are you applying for work? You can wait. I don't know when he'll be back."

Marjorie sat down in one of the shiny chairs. She was too warm in her coat and gloves. The stenographer went on with her typing. She was small, very dainty, with brown hair marcelled and neatly fastened in a net, a little face with tiny, discontented features. Marjorie admired distantly the fineness of the white organdie collar and cuffs that she wore with her navy-blue suit. She was frail, but with something capable and disdainful in the droop of her small mouth and the cold glance of her pale hazel eyes with their worn lids. The fingers of her tiny hands flew over the keys with a sharp competency.

When Mr. Milhousen came into the room, Marjorie rose, her heart thumping; and when he did not seem to see her, she stood, not knowing whether to speak to him or not. Huge, significant moments of time passed before the stenographer briefly mentioned that she was there. She was afraid of Mr. Milhousen's bulkiness, his pale aggressive business man's face with the protuberant blue eyes. He looked over the card that she had brought from the Bureau.

"Haven't had any business experience," he stated.

"I've worked for my father."

"In his office?"

"Yes." She flushed, thinking of that dark little cubby-hole in the store, with the old desk crammed with bills and catalogues. Well, it *was* papa's office, wasn't it? "I helped keep his books and did the typing."

"No real experience, though. Well," he said brusquely, "I guess we might take you on. Try you out and see what you can do. We can give you fifteen a week, I guess. That all right?"

She murmured "Yes," feeling the accusation of her uncertainty and lack of experience so that she could not ask for the eighteen dollars that the girl at the Bureau had suggested.

"All right. Miss Grow!"

The stenographer came over to him, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"This is Miss—what did you say your name was? Oh, Schussel. She's going to try the filing. Give her that last form letter to copy. Try her out on the typing. The last one couldn't do a thing. You can ask Miss Grow about anything you don't understand. She'll show you what to do this morning."

Miss Grow handled the letters with a cool fastidious scorn. It would have been less dreadful to have asked even Mr. Milhousen about things than to ask Miss Grow. She gave a few slight directions, then sat down at her low typing-desk again. Marjorie tried desperately to manage the strange typewriter, dreading the time when she would have to ask Miss Grow to change the ribbon. She flushed hotly when Mr. Milhousen looked at her work, and asked if she had made those commas for periods. The day was hopelessly long, with the same thing to do over and over again. Even in the store, she had been able to leave the desk whenever she liked, to see Hummer unpack new furniture, or to talk to people who came in. The back of her neck began to pain with a queer, cold feeling. She was too scrupulous this first day to stop typing for a moment, although she did have to twist in her chair and try to ease her back. She was afraid at the end of the day that Mr. Milhousen would tell her not to come back, because of the commas; but he only said "Nine o'clock" in an oracular tone, and went out early.

It was dark when she left the building for the noisy, crowded streets. Two girls pushed past her, knocking her hat askew. She ate frugally at a cafeteria, and then stood up all the way home in the packed suburban train.

She slept only at feverish intervals during the night. The future was terrifying, full of the noise and roar and ruthless pushing of the city streets. The pleasant little interlude at the physical-training school was over. She had refused the position in the little school in Arkansas. She was in Chicago, earning her own living—free.

Papa and mamma wrote just as she had expected. They had spent all that time and money giving Marjorie special training for which she had talent—and here she was, working in an office, living on fifteen dollars a week, doing something that any girl could do. She would have been better off at home, where she could have saved all that she made working for her father. She could have stayed until she had found some nice teaching position, not too far from home. Mamma was glad that she had not gone to Arkansas. Even Bud had written from Iowa City that he "didn't get Marge."

The strangest thing of all was that it was not the "lovely training" or the talent that had got her job for her, but the reluctant hours that she had spent working on the books and pounding the old Remington in the store. She did not see how she could make money by using her training, except in some way that was dishonest, unreal, worse than what she was doing now.

2

The feeling of Chicago was all changed by the job—that reckless feeling, when for a little while she had been a student again, going with other girls to hear concerts and see pictures, spending her money for clothes and for Martha Washington chocolates to send to Aunt Bessie.

Now she must get up early. "Cutting school" was very

different from losing a day of work. She gave herself ten minutes for breakfast in a cafeteria which she chose because of the canary in the window. Sometimes there was a deliberate person in the long winding line ahead of her, trying to decide between oatmeal and cream of wheat, making her lose one of her precious minutes. She had to rush across the crowded, dark, dirty, slippery streets to the office.

The morning was endurable. The letters on the shiny desk did not look so bad. She could even take interest in the names that she was typing neatly upon new filing cards, and copy some of them to send to Emily.

Peake Bros.,
Perfection, Kansas.

She ate in a little chocolate shop near the office. Then she went up into the girls' rest room—a small dingy room with a broken-down wicker lounge and a few old rockers. Office girls were chattering about dances, powdering their faces with big round dirty velours puffs, eating lunches from cardboard boxes. How many of them had fat soft faces with full, blurred-looking lips and a kind of helpless, hurt look in their brown eyes, in spite of their loud voices! . . . Then the hideous monotony of the afternoon—her eyes aching, that pain in the back of her neck. What if she should have to get glasses? If she bought glasses, paying a little for them every week, it would be months before she could have shoes. She could never afford to have dental work done. She would have to let her teeth get to look like Hummer's. She could just live through the drag of the last hour.

If she stayed with Mr. Milhousen for three months, and gave satisfaction, she would get seventeen dollars a week. The two extra dollars were riches—concerts and plays, a new pair of gloves in place of those that were getting so hideously shabby. But she was too tired to go out at night, alone, to concerts; and when she went, the music made her sick and dissatisfied. She spent the evenings in her solitary

room, reading until she got too sleepy. She could have books, at least. In the library at home, she knew the place of every book on the shelves. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who was on the library board, had thought it "almost a crime" to leave the *Spoon River Anthology* in the library—it used such a dreadful word on one page.

At home, she used to talk as if a job would solve everything. But she had the job now, the reality. It opened no vistas, but closed them instead, and penned her into its own tiny, hard, methodical world.

She drew a little consolation from the approval of Mr. Milhousen, the feeling of being trusted and useful and reliable. If she stayed years and years, thinking of nothing else, making this one little job her life, she would have achieved a humble, small, feminine place for herself. She would have to worship Mr. Milhousen, pretend that she did not see through that naïve bluster of grown-up boy with which he tried to hide his human weaknesses from his underlings. She would have to keep on being silent and deferential when he asked her, with a shamefaced clearing of the throat, to type those envelopes that his little boy wanted to send out—answers to advertisements for samples of Morning Bloom Face Powder and Dr. Sampson's Sure-Cure Constipation Pills.

Or she could be like Miss Grow, coldly expert at her work, and drawing her personal solace, the food of her self-respect, from her scorn of the deficiencies and slipshod ways of other girls; coming to work sometimes with red swollen eyelids and an air of proud reserve; and reading Mrs. Eddy at noon in the hope that she could "find something to believe in." "Working up in business," sticking to her work and making it her life—achieving finally a little place of her own instead of a furnished room, slowly accumulating possessions in it, a new lamp, a desk, pretty dishes; the dreadful stoniness of that, with all her real life going unfed.

It seemed to her that the "interesting" contacts, the glam-

orous new intimacies, were as far away as in Buena Vista. There was only the woman who had known Aunt Bessie, and who was making an anthology of hymns for an obscure publishing-house; and a few girls whom she met to "go on a bat," to spend more than they could afford at a tea-room and then to go to the movies. There was the salesman who wanted to take her out to dinner. She had meant to go, recklessly, throwing her fastidiousness to the winds, angry at the stony celibacy of her life—thinking she would be like that girl from Shell Rock who got good meals and flowers and gifts by going out with that fat old married man and letting him fondle her once in a while. But a horror of the salesman came over her when he stood leaning over her as she wrote. She could not play up to him. A dreadful little city Jew with a big shiny nose, a loud suit, and a hard Cady hat on one side of his head. The fact that she was in the very city where the office of the poetry magazine stood, from which Emily had had a letter about one of her verses—giving at first a radiancy and expectation to the harsh streets—made little difference after all. She would not go there, as Emily wanted her to do, because she was shyly and scrupulously conscious of having done nothing to justify a visit. There was only the occasional glimpse of the blue lake on her way to the city, books, the Art Institute on Sundays, a little music—and her constant fatigue and loneliness to take the edge off all enjoyment.

3

After the bleak emotionless grind of all these days, what she really felt when the letter about mamma came was not suffering, rather something that strung all her faculties to a high pitch and roused a deep, unconscious courage. It was something that mattered, it called for real faculties. The consciousness of it heightened her perception of everything—of the side-to-side jerking of the train and its steady rush forward; the familiar smooth dip and rise of the Iowa country,

with the oak leaves rusty and withered upon the gnarled trees, and patches of snow melting into the damp black of the earth of late winter. The knowledge that Aunt Bessie could not come, that it was she herself who would have to do everything—take the household in charge, take mamma to Rochester—did not frighten her but raised a deep, exultant courage.

And even the sharp, actual suffering that had come when she saw mamma—her frailness, the withered look about her little face, the grey in her fine black hair—had been better than the stoniness of these last months. There had been an exaltation in caring for mamma, in spite of the shyness it gave her; in combing her soft thin hair, making her wear the pretty kimono that Aunt Bessie had sent, keeping Mrs. Bradley and Mrs. Fitzpatrick away from her. Those departing backs—Mrs. Fitzpatrick's small and tight, Mrs. Bradley's bulky and wobbly, but both with that same expression of avid, ghoulish faith in the worst. Rich used to say that Mrs. Bradley had every woman dead before the doctor called, and was picking out the next wife for the widower. Well, she needn't think she could worry mamma with her dreadful forebodings. . . . They would not have asked the boys to give up their work and come home because mamma was ill. Marjorie resented the notion of this, but she did not resent it actually. No job mattered beside mamma. People came first.

And, even while she had suffered, she had known exultantly that she was equal to all that came—the trip to Rochester, the long hours at the clinic to which she had taken mamma, the operation. That unbelievable ordeal had come relentlessly, as other things had come: partings, the closing of one little epoch after another. She had lived through it, sustained it. It made her think of the ocean as she had seen it from the rocks at Nahant—the sense of depth and strength and illimitable passionate force bearing down her childish fear of the dark water shattered against the rocks and the spray dashing through the crevices. She would de-

vote herself to mamma. She could hardly bear the feeling of tenderness that mamma gave her . . . little and slender, her fine black hair, her dainty ways, her fond delicate hands worn with sewing and housework. Even her dear little name—Lucetta Blossom.

And even now—now that they were at home, that mamma was getting better, that all the familiar things and ways brought the reassurance that no dreadful thing could really happen to her own family—some of that exaltation persisted. She was still necessary, relied upon. Aunt Bessie had to stay with Grandpa. Marjorie was at the head of the household.

The household had not yet settled into the old routine. Neighbours came and went. Mrs. Phillips brought delicacies that other people in Buena Vista did not have—calves-foot jelly and guava jelly, a large box of oranges and pecans from Florida. Mr. Phillips brought wine—"You needn't tell our good friend Mrs. Bradley," he said with a dry little smile. Mrs. Fitzpatrick came over with the fresh cinnamon rolls for which she was famous; and when Mrs. Bradley waddled over day after day with warm fresh gingerbread, Marjorie almost forgave her for her curious little eyes and her mournful gossip. Standing in the pantry, solemnly, her eyes bright, Marjorie took a little bit of each kind of jelly gleaming in the various glasses; and getting a little cut-glass goblet from the buffet, she tasted Mr. Phillips' wine. A fume of alcohol rose from the bright surface, with its mysterious under-depth of colour, and after a moment she liked the delicate burning in her throat. The cyclamen that Mrs. Phillips had sent, with its thick tender stems and cool crisp blossoms of frost-white streaked with purple, gave a different feeling to the parlour.

She need not think beyond mamma's recovery. The present was too urgent, too close. She could revel secretly in the little things of home: to be able to snuggle down on the couch a few minutes after dinner with a book, in the warm sunshine that came through the living-room windows; to

have Buster with her; to run out into the kitchen for a piece of fresh bread and butter, and to eat it slowly as she read. Sometimes while she was working in the kitchen, she would suddenly throw down her dish towel and dash into the parlour, play a few bars on the piano, dash back.

If the cooking went wrong, she could run across the lawn at any time to ask Orpha about it. She felt petted and admired, still a child, in that familiar little kitchen with its cleanliness, and faint odours of food, that tall walnut cupboard with the scalloped paper on the shelves, the calendar from the store hung neatly on the wall.

Now, when she went into her own little room at night, she loved passionately the pink-and-green rug getting softly faded, her white bookcase and old books. She felt an intimacy with these four narrow walls, with their silvery pattern and border of little roses, that hurt unbearably at times, and at times was more beautiful and satisfying than anything in the world. Lying in her bed and reading, stretching luxuriously between her smooth white sheets, slowly turning the pages and reaching over to get the apple that she had put on her chair, hearing those sounds of home that she remembered —coal dropping in the furnace, the faint tiny bang of an attic window, the movement of branches outside—she knew that she was happier at home than anywhere else, when she was needed, when there was actually a reason for her being there.

4

Marjorie usually stopped at the garage in Oak Grove when she was driving to Wahseta, to have Rich "fix up the car." The two Schoessel households had long been on outwardly good terms; but Eva was watchful, was offended if she saw the Schoessel car drive past the house without stopping.

Marjorie dreaded these visits, with the elaborate pretence of household amity that Eva thought necessary to keep up before her. Rich made no pretence at all. He did not try to hide the thin bitterness and mental barrenness of his life

at home, or his constant bickerings with Eva over Herbert.

"Rich! For heaven's sake! That hurts him."

"Does not. He likes it."

"You'll have him crying again in a minute."

"Oh, this big kid doesn't cry when he's playing with his dad—do you, big boy?"

"Well, he does when his daddy is so rough with him, and doesn't care what he does to his little arms."

"Well, great Scott, look at him! *Is* he crying?"

"If he isn't, I should think he would."

Marjorie kept her attention painfully and earnestly on the book that she had picked up from the library table. All her sympathy wanted to go to Rich. Nevertheless she could not help seeing that part of Eva's nagging came from the realization that she no longer counted for much with Rich. After a while, Rich said with careful casualness:

"Want to walk over to the garage with me, Marge?"

She answered quickly that she did.

They cut across a field by a little path. Rich was different as soon as they had left behind them the shiny little new bungalow, with its glittering barrenness. He walked silently along for a while, catching at the heads of the tall grasses along the path and not looking up.

"I'd like to get out of this garage business," he muttered.

"You like working with machines, though, Rich."

"Oh, well enough. But I'd like to get out of this whole part of the country for a while, and see something. There's nothing in this working until all hours of the night, even if a fellow does get good money for it. What's he going to spend his money for, in a burg like this? Know where I'd like to go?"

"No," Marjorie answered, waiting for his confidence, holding back her question as to why he didn't sell out, if he wanted to, and go to a larger town. Of course she knew why. The business paid well, the home was new, their establishment was secure here, Eva would not risk going.

"I'd like to go out as engineer on a merchant ship. You'd

get to see something that way. Get clear out of this darned mess 'most everybody lives in."

Marjorie did not answer, marvelling at so much unreserve from Rich. But there was sympathy between them, in spite of her unspoken questions as to why he had been determined to marry Eva, why he hadn't seen what it must lead to, why he hadn't accepted technical training when papa and mamma had wanted to let him have it. . . . There was sympathy, all the same. He liked to have her come. When he stopped at home sometimes for an hour or so—getting supplies from the garage in Buena Vista, or looking after freight—he asked her what books she was reading now, and occasionally took one of them home with him to Oak Grove. He had dug out of the attic his old worn-out copies of *Tom Sawyer* and *The Three Musketeers*. Once in a while, he managed to bring Herbert with him; and she could see, when he got away from Eva, how passionately fond he was of the little fellow, how gravely he accepted the "presents" of stones and twigs and squashed dandelion heads with which Herbert kept trotting into the house.

There was a car in the garage that the assistant could not mend. Rich had to get into his oil-stained coveralls and crawl under it, begin to tinker. The garage stood on open ground, with a vacant lot next to it. The big tree beside it was just coming into bud. Fresh new grass was showing under the old matted weeds in the vacant lot. From where she stood, Marjorie could look off toward the low hills beyond the town, that were covered with soft pale green, trees in delicate spring foliage poised lightly on the slopes. Men stood about, looking at the disabled car, offering suggestions and comments. "Think she'll run now, Shess?" Their voices were slow. The scene had a touch of idyllic leisure. And yet there was a dreariness about it. She felt it, somehow, in Rich's slender active figure as he moved about the car, touching things with nervous expert hands. His face was thin, with his old boyish freckles, but with restless eyes,

a bitterness in the set of the lips, sharply drawn lines of dissatisfaction.

Why had he been so determined to marry Eva? Simply because his family had opposed it? She thought so sometimes. Rich had a cross-grained streak. Had he ever really been illusioned about Eva—or had he really wanted her because she, and the girls she went with, had been the most popular, the most desirable, wild, gay, aggressive, sure of themselves? Rich was so self-contained, so thornily reserved, it was hard to tell. But he made no pretence of any illusion now. It was plain that he had separated his mental life completely from Eva's, and expected nothing from her. He was "good to her," "gave her everything she asked for," as mamma said—but he regarded her with a kind of bitter tolerance. All women were that way—except his mother and sister and aunt, whom he unconsciously excluded (since they need not count in the way of desire) and did not place under the head of "Women." He scorned, so he thought, all that had to do with them, and declared only "men's books" worth reading—adventure, travel; scorned "Women" for not having brains, and despised the ones who had. . . . Yes, it was unaccountable. Marjorie thought over the half-perceived ins and outs of the long affair, as she drove home through the spring afternoon, along the pale gravelled road. She was rebellious. Rich was wrong. It was his own fault, for his own blindness. But a queer pity for him made her throat ache. She liked Rich better now, they were closer together, than ever before. She was closer to Rich than to her own, dear little Bud.

Chapter III

I

WHEN the war came, Marjorie had a guilty sense that it had been her fault. Because things had been settling down into the old routine again—the household as always, only narrowed, deadened, now that the two boys were gone; the town going about its old ways; and the old nagging problems besieging her again.

Mrs. Phillips had been saying all along that the United States ought to "go in"; had come back from the East horrified because the people of Buena Vista were so backward and "did not feel the war." To most of the people it had seemed far away, something that could never come close. Some resented it, others seized upon it now to help break up the long monotony of everyday living—more terribly thrilling than a fire in the business district, a drowning in the river, or the discovery that the cashier of the Farmers' Bank had been embezzling.

Something had come, it seemed, to shake up that placid, solid, comfortable life of home, changing things around, shifting values that had seemed to be fixed. There were, at last, different things to go to than the card parties at which Marjorie had railed so long. There were the Red Cross meetings in the upper rooms of the Armoury—"so nice," a little bride who had been a stranger in town said, "because they gave her a chance to get acquainted with the ladies." Mrs. Phillips wanted the Tourist Club to be turned into a league for conservation. She talked about the "foreign element" and headed a delegation of ladies to demand of Mr. Prosser that no German be taught in the schools. Mrs.

Phillips told in the conservation talks that she was giving to the women of the community, how she had put her sugar into little sealed packets, such as were used in hotels, and how only a certain number of packets could be used each day. "Yes, but those packets all cost something," the "very women whom she had hoped to reach" went away saying. "We haven't all got the time to spend. I suppose while she's doing that, the girl was getting up the meals. She can talk —but I guess the Phillipses aren't going to starve."

And queer people were coming to the front. Guy Wiggins was a Y.M.C.A. official. One of his letters was published in the *Chronicle*—headed "Dear Family at Home," but telling in rhetorical terms of "the boys," the splendid work of the "Y," with statistics of the camp and long and glowing descriptions of France. A dance was given in the Armoury for the boys who were going in the first draft. Ivanhoe Atwater was one of them. To see Ivanhoe Atwater treated as a hero, all the girls willing to dance with him—Ivanhoe, about whom they used to sob: "I won't play!" when his name was given in Tin-tin! Life could change.

Marriages flourished. One of the most amazing was the sudden romance of Anne and Chub Patterson. Chub, who had been in Omaha working for an insurance company, came home for a few days before going to an Officers' Training-Camp. The look in his eye, the touch of his hand, made it visible that the chief thing under his visit was a resolve to get a wife before he left. Marjorie was glad that Rich called her to Oak Grove to take care of little Herbert while Eva was convalescing from ptomaine poisoning. But Chub was ready—Anne was ready—it took one dance to settle everything. Marjorie got a mad telephone call from Anne to come home from Oak Grove at once and be present at her wedding with Chub . . . Chub Patterson actually married—and to Anne, who had had no suitor before, who had never "gone with a boy"! Marjorie did not want Chub Patterson. All the same, he was the one, necessary to every girl, of whom

she could think: I can have him if I want him. Chub had always shouted: "I'm going to have Margie on mine!" when they had chosen sides for pom-pom-pullaway; had let her esape without scalping when they had played Pilgrims and Indians; "would have gone with her if she would have let him," as Rich used to tell her accusingly. . . . And Harry Ryan, after a few experimental letters from camp to every girl in town whom he had ever admired, had married a girl in the South. And then came Neva's marriage to an army officer in California.

Even Jessie came out of her obscurity. She got a position in Washington as a telephone operator—the first girl in Buena Vista to leave for "war work." Marjorie met her on the street. Jessie talked with her old eager confidence, as if at last that little barrier between them was gone. Jessie seemed to have blossomed, to have burst out of that shrouding little film of inadequacy and pathos that had dimmed her vivacity. She had bought a pretty new suit and a bright red hat, the very kind of clothes that Jessie ought to wear. Her small gipsy face, that had been getting dark-skinned and pinched, was now just on the point of breaking into the prettiness that it had always promised. Her voice was eager, had lost its minor note. Her grey-green eyes shone with expectancy.

Marjorie went home slowly and sombrely. There was something different for everyone but herself. Why was it that the most unexpected people were doing the most talked-of things now?—just as if some under-force were working of itself, shaking things up, bringing people to the top the way the kernels were jostled up in a popcorn-shaker! Perhaps it was right, it had to be that way.

But now that the boys were gone, she could not leave home. Mamma had been happy at first because she had thought that neither of the boys would have to go. Bud was drilling in the S.A.T.C.; but the war would surely be over before he was called. Rich could claim exemption as

a husband and father—for the first time, mamma was glad of Rich's marriage.

But Rich had refused to claim exemption. From the very first, he had been wild to go. Eva drove over to Buena Vista to get her mother-in-law's help—wept, and tried to get mamma to "use her influence" with Rich. "He won't listen to me. You might think he didn't have a wife or child. How does he think the garage is going to get along? Both the boys he had working for him are gone, and that old idiot of a Gresham Potter can't run it alone. He might think a little of his business, anyway!" When Marjorie went over to Oak Grove, she heard this dispute going on, interminably.

"You always pretend to care so much more for Herbert than I do. But you're willing to go off and leave him—leave him without a father."

Rich said bitterly: "You ought to be glad of that. You're always giving it to me if I 'interfere' with Herbert."

"I know very well why you're trying to go. You want to get away from us. I've known it—you don't need to say anything! You want to desert your wife and son."

"I don't want to desert my son," Rich muttered.

And when Eva began to sob wildly, he went out of the house.

Marjorie saw him for only a moment before she drove home. He was coming across lots to patch up some kind of peace with Eva. He looked shamefaced, but sombre and bitter.

"Have to go, Marge?" he said. "Well, I don't blame you for getting out."

He showed his feeling for her, his shame over the scene she had witnessed, in Rich's own way . . . getting out the car for her, looking it over, tightening the plugs, taking it to the garage and filling it with gasolene and oil. They were too constrained by the scene they had gone through to say much to each other. But, in spite of Marjorie's momentary flare of anger at the cruelty of that one speech to Eva, they

felt a deep unspoken alliance—such as they had felt when they used to unite against Ethel and May in childhood visits to Wahseta, and when they had had to sit wiggling through long church services. Rich took hold of the steering-wheel, which she was holding lightly, and stood there a moment looking across the vacant lot.

"You'd think from the fuss Eva kicks up now, that she was crazy over me," he muttered. "I know darn well why she wants me to stay. I'm mighty useful, I'll tell you."

All of them—even Eva—talked now of Rich's patriotism. Aunt Bessie wrote how proud Grandpa Blossom was. Marjorie made socks and sweaters and candy. But she wondered, an unspoken reservation always in her mind. Was she the only one who knew that it was not "patriotism" at all—that Rich was going because it gave him the chance at last to break routine, to indulge that old adventurous youth that had been early thwarted, turned aside; conscious, like herself, of qualities that he had never used, and seizing this mad chance to bring them to some kind of fruition?

She had times of wild longing to do this same thing herself—to get out into a different life, to have a part in what the others were doing, to snatch something for herself from the conflagration as it seemed to her that other people did. Jessie's photograph was in the Wahseta daily——

BUENA VISTA GIRL FIRST IN COUNTY TO REACH CAPITOL.

Mr. Cole came back from California bringing grandiloquent accounts of Neva's wedding. Her husband—a widower, much older than Neva, with glitteringly brushed hair and stiff moustaches—was stationed on the coast. Emily wrote that she wanted to go to Russia. She hated the war, and she did not want to stay in a country where they were putting people in prison for telling the truth. Even Hummer tried to enlist, and was turned down because of flat feet. Bud's letters were boyish—slamming the officers and the food, but always going with the current. Rich's were full of feverish eagerness, as if he were living only in this little

bit of time snatched out of a long dreary level of existence. Now that Rich was gone, Eva was quite consoled—more than consoled, Marjorie suggested satirically—by the glory and importance of being a soldier's wife. She was the most active member of the Oak Grove Red Cross. She kept on the bookcase a large photograph of Rich in uniform, taken to fulfil a promise to his mother and Aunt Bessie: different, younger, his face filled and the sharp lines gone. Anne came over, radiant, to read Marjorie the letters from "George," as she now called Chub; almost beside herself with the unexpected glory of being a war bride, of marrying when Neva did, and someone who had belonged to the older crowd and been an admirer of Marjorie. All her most aspiring dreams were answered almost too dazzlingly. She could see nothing but glory in the war. And she could not keep from her manner an air of joyous patronage.

Marjorie writhed under this, under the feeling of uselessness, of insignificance. She talked wildly of being a nurse or an "entertainer" in a war camp; rebelled against staying in Buena Vista, where all that she could do was to sell stamps and tags and artificial flowers. The Red Cross, although it advertised widely for the help of everyone, was turned into a nicely graded social organization in which the same "ladies"—Mrs. Phillips, the three Mrs. Pattersons, Mrs. Struthers, Mrs. Schoessel, Mrs. Willis—were prominent. Mrs. Phillips was county chairman of the Red Cross. The girls who were invited to meet at the Phillips house to fill kit bags for the soldiers were the "nicest girls."

But she did not want to be an entertainer. In spite of her uneasy envy of Jessie and Rich and all the others, she hated the war; and that old desire for integrity would not let her be quite illusioned, or use this thing for her own small purposes. Although she read *In Flanders Field* on the war program that Mrs. Phillips, the minister and Percy Franklin had given in Oak Grove and Leland and Byron; although she went from house to house on the Liberty Loan drive—still, she held her real self aloof. When Mrs. Phil-

lips talked about Hun atrocities, she looked in rebellious wonder at her own father's mild, kindly face; remembered the old Germantown farm and Grandpa Schoessel picking out an ear of corn with red silk for a dolly . . . Grandma in her dress of sprigged black lawn, her beaming smile and shy, loving touch. . . . She was ashamed when she went into those little houses on "the other side of town" to ask people to buy war stamps; was silent, and let Marian Willis do the talking. In her secret thoughts, she was torn between loyalty to her brothers and admiration of Emily's fiery statements. She could not see clearly. She did not know what to do until this was over—if it ever was. The only person in Buena Vista to whom it would have been possible to confide these secret thoughts, was old Mrs. Davison. She had told the minister that she could no longer be a member of a church where war sermons were preached and the Prince of Peace "denied"; and she had withdrawn the membership that she had held for over forty years. Even Orpha Putz believed that this was a holy war.

But Mrs. Davison was old. She had nothing to gain for herself, nothing to lose. No one would really make trouble for Mrs. Davison, whom even B. T. Patterson called a saint. She could not know what it was to be young, to stand aside, out of the current, not sure of herself, perhaps missing everything.

2

Emily had written of the influenza epidemic in the East, but it had given the unreal and not unpleasurable excitement of a disaster at a distance. The first that people in Buena Vista really knew of it was when Jessie died in Washington. Now it was actual, dark, immediate, like a storm-cloud visibly advancing. It was something that had killed Jessie.

Marjorie went into the attic one day to find some silk pieces. The old playthings were in a corner under the cobwebs. Books that she had put there, dusty old piles of the *St. Nicholas* and *Youth's Companion* tied with string, the

dolls in their reed carriage, the little blackboard. She could see Jessie putting her impish little drawings around the edge of the board while she herself and Neva stood side by side importantly holding long pieces of chalk . . . Jessie running down the road being Tarbaby when they acted out the Little Colonel books.

And now it seemed to her that she had known, the moment she had heard this last news, that it was exactly the thing that would happen to Jessie. She could hear, again, Jessie reading *Little Orphant Annie* with that queer, lonely vibration in her voice; her own feeling of remorse, of secret reproach, when Jessie had been given the lowest place on the program. She had that feeling now—as if she had let herself act with life itself, which had never given Jessie her due. Jessie in her red hat and new suit, vivid with eagerness—and then dying, herded up with strangers in a crowded boarding-house, almost before the new experience had begun.

Her hands fumbled among the little bundles of silk in the bag that hung against the attic wall. For the first time, standing alone in this dim familiar place, she seemed actually to realize the passing of her childhood. Jessie was gone; killed by a thing that had been only a far, unbelievable rumour, that was coming close, that might touch other people.

The epidemic began to close down with the dark horror of actuality. Mamma was in constant fear about the boys. In spite of the cases that were beginning to appear more and more quickly in Buena Vista, she felt that Ed and Marjorie were safe because she had them at home. When the telegram came saying that Rich was ill in camp, "I knew it!" she said at once. She told Orpha Putz that she had been ready to leave at any moment.

Mamma and papa went at once to the training-camp with Eva. Marjorie kept little Herbert at home. In spite of the sick fear gnawing through all her preoccupations, she was protected by a sense of invulnerability, by her old trust —justified at the time of mamma's operation—that nothing

could touch her own people. There was no meaning in papa's telegram when it came.

"Rich dead." She had no belief in it. But she could hardly control the sudden fierce tenderness she felt for little Herbert running after his old friend Buster, who moved with mournful dignity a few paces away. She astonished the baby by catching him up, with her cheek pressed against his warm flossy head, and passionately whispering: "Baby, *baby!*"

Anne stayed with her so that she would not be alone in the house. Orpha Putz had wanted her to bring Herbert and stay in the same little room with the walnut bed where she used to sleep when her father and mother had gone to Germantown. But she would not forsake her charge of the plants and the furnace. She wanted to be nowhere but at home. She could be "wonderful" before Anne. But when she ran down to look after the furnace, she called Buster to her, put her arms around his rough neck, and eased herself with dry sobbing.

She was proud, and her courage held. She could be at the door when mamma and papa came home. It was not as she had feared. Mamma was "wonderful" too, with a little set smile on her lips. Nothing could be so bad when papa was there to look after them; but the sight of papa's face, ravaged and unsteady, made her feel that all the security in the universe was undermined. Then this dreadful thing was true. She was sustained by the queer feeling that they were all strangers to one another, acting a part that could not be real.

The services were held in the parlour. Half the town was ill, the other half terrified. Only a few people were there: the Phillipses, the Fitzpatricks, Hummer, Aunt Bessie. Mamma was hurt because Mrs. Dorr Patterson, the mother of Rich's old chum, did not attend. She was afraid of the epidemic. There was something furtive about this brief ceremony. Marjorie thought, all through the strange service which seemed to have nothing to do with any of them, of

Herbert playing in Mrs. Putz's parlour, where Orpha had stayed to take care of him; and then of old Buster, shut out of the house and wandering, unrealizing and yet with a dim painful sense of trouble, about the thawing yard.

The road out to the cemetery was a mass of black slippery mud with dirty melting snow in the wheel tracks. Farmers were driving into town in wagons. The little string of cars had to go cautiously. They skidded at times. Mamma was not afraid for their own car, but for the auto hearse. When she thought that it was going over the embankment, she drew in her breath sharply and clutched papa's arm. They had hired a man to drive it, and Hummer was driving their own car.

There was the time in the cemetery to be lived through. She would never forget the wet feel of the air, the sliding of the soft ground under their feet, the chill of the little patch of dirty grainy snow under a clump of dark evergreens near which they stood. But this scene could have nothing to do with her—with Rich. The passionate handclasp of Aunt Bessie, who was lifting up her veil and trying to get her little black-gloved hand with the crumpled handkerchief beneath it to wipe her eyes, was meaningless.

She was startled to hear Eva crying loudly, to see her being helped from the cemetery by Mr. Phillips and Mr. Fitzpatrick. That one sharp glimpse of the distressed faces of the two men, and Eva's convulsed features, held all the painful unreality of the day.

3

The landscape that used to be so soft and friendly, with its low hills and shallow creeks, its rich fields, now had a relentlessness in the lines of the sloping pastures against the grey winter sky. The oaks had an iron look, with the side toward the south black from melted snow.

Astounding, upsetting things happened, some of them absurd, but the most absurd with an element of ironic cruelty.

Ivanhoe Atwater, for his brief time a hero, was now a deserter, lost and hunted. Guy Wiggins had come home with tuberculosis after a long illness of influenza in France. Frances Patterson, who had adopted a French orphan, fervent with ideals of service, could not get along with the child and had taken it to a Home in Boston.

And in a way, one of the most astounding, upsetting things of all was Hummer's marriage. It was, as mamma said, not so much the thing itself as the way that it was done. Hummer—for so long a kind of adjunct to the family, a part of the store itself; who had driven the car for mamma when papa couldn't get away, bound up Buster's paw when he was hurt, made the tree-house, mended doll-furniture! And now to marry, to leave the store, without a word to any of them, even to papa, of what he meant to do! Mrs. Fitzpatrick had come in that night, declaring in great excitement that she had heard that Hummer and that girl from Leland had just been married; and they had all treated it as a joke, impossible. Hummer marry without telling them about it? Hummer had been going to get married for twenty years.

But the next morning at the store, when papa said jestingly: "What's this we hear about you, Homer?"—"Guess it's so," Hummer had conceded, grinning, shamefaced but proud.

And it was true, just as Mrs. Fitz. had told them, that Hummer had bought out a grocery store at Leland and was going to move there. Mamma declared: "Well, will the sky fall next!" And papa was hurt, they could see, that after all these years Hummer should have left him almost without notice, and just when he had been needed most. Perhaps there really were no faithful retainers, as there were in books—perhaps even retainers were people. Hummer had been lonely. He had had to attach himself to something. When he had got a wife, belatedly, and interests of his own, his old loyalty to the Schoessel family had partly dropped away.

When they drove out in the summer to see Hummer's

store at Leland, he grinned and seemed proud to show them around. But a little feeling of resentment lingered on their part, a little feeling of guilt on his, that made even his old teasing a trifle laboured. That old relationship, which had been part of the very fabric of life, was changed.

Yet, after all, half of these astounding happenings were simply what might have been expected. No sudden blaze of glory could turn Ivanhoe Atwater into a hero. The excitement, the sense of change and disruption, of expectation, quickly resolved itself—when the war was over—into the old known things. Shaken up, another side presented, but still themselves. All the strange promise of the war, that for a time had seemed to be transforming people, had come to little. It had left Anne proudly and beyond her expectation the wife of Chub Patterson, settled now in a bungalow in Omaha; had set Neva in the position that she had wanted, with her wedding photograph in a fashionable magazine. But others to whom it had shown sudden and shining promise, it had ruthlessly and savagely denied—as if to say that old values could not be overturned as easily as that. Now it was largely the dregs of change that remained.

The wonderful union between mamma and Eva did not last, in spite of mamma's heroic efforts to make a daughter of Eva. Her widowhood, at first, had seemed to change Eva. Marjorie, in spite of sceptical reluctance—for which the others had reprimanded her—had almost been forced to believe in a transformed Eva: one whose face was scourged with emotion, who kept the imposing military photograph of Rich on her dresser and had no more pleasure in existence but to sit and talk about him with mamma. Marjorie could not bear to hear those low-toned, intimate conversations going on. But now it began to be seen that Eva was not going to be contented after all with devotion only to Herbert and mamma and the memory of Rich. She talked about getting something to do, wept and said that she must have something to help her endure her loneliness. Mamma sympathized, arranged with papa that Eva should be given

something to do in the store. Eva did not like that. It "kept reminding her," she said. She talked about taking a business course. Rich's estate was still tied up so that Eva had little ready money, but papa—asserting that she was in the right—agreed to let her have enough so that she could study at the new business college in Wahseta. Herbert was to be left with his grandparents.

Mamma had defended Eva against the ladies who could not understand—they said—how Eva could bear to go off and leave her child so soon after she had "lost the father." But mamma was disappointed and unsure when the letters from Eva, so profuse at first, filled with protestations of Eva's gratitude and affection to Mother and Father Schoessel, dwindled. When Eva came home over a week-end, they could see a change in her. There was something not quite open in her manner, and she seemed to be avoiding a "real talk" with mamma. She had quickly learned to dress like a city woman. With her marcelled hair, her bright green blouse and green ear-rings, there was a different look about her altogether.

After her visit, a long interval came before they heard from her again. When Marjorie came home from the store one day, she saw that her mother had been crying. Mamma said significantly, in a low voice:

"I had a letter from Eva this morning. Now I see why we hadn't heard from her."

The letter was written on fashionable new stationery, but in Eva's half-formed hand, with commas in the place of periods and a sprinkling of mis-spelled words.

". . . Of course in a way Rich means more in my life Mother Schoessel, than any man can again. He is the father of my dear little Herbert, but Noel and I truly care for each other and we feel that we can be living a better and more useful life together. Noel is a fine man, he is not like Rich but no one could be, but he cares for me and I believe will truly make me a good husband, And I think Herbert should have a father and I believe you will feel the same Mother Schoessel because every boy needs a father and as Herbert grew up he would miss having a father. Now Mother Schoessel

don't think because I am taking this step I don't care just as much for you and Father Schoessel and all of you yes, and for Rich too but after all we are not meant to live alone. . . ."

Marjorie thought that papa did not seem greatly surprised when he read the letter. But he did ask mildly what Eva was going to do with her business course.

Marjorie heard them talking in the living-room that night, when she ran down to the kitchen to get an apple before going to sleep.

Papa was saying: "Well, mamma, you know she's a young woman. We can't blame her."

"I don't blame her." Mamma's voice quavered. "I wouldn't think nearly so much about it if it had just come to her. But I feel as if she had meant to do this when she went to Wahseta—that was what was under it, Ed, I know it. So soon—if it hadn't been so soon!"

"I know it, mamma. It looks that way to us, of course——"

"She never was the right one for Rich—never! What hurts me most, papa, is that I can't help feeling that everything would have turned out differently if he hadn't married her. I don't see—" mamma began to sob—"I don't see why it all had to be . . . when we tried so hard . . ."

Marjorie went quickly up the back stairs. She wanted angrily to protect mamma and papa against the whole world, to change it, somehow, even now. . . . But she was resentful of mamma's conscientious efforts to justify Eva. She said with youthful scorn and intolerance that she had no use for anyone who could "live a more useful life" with Noel Fisher after having made Rich miserable—"She did, mamma. You know it. What's the use of saying Rich wasn't absolutely wretched at home?" Noel was a travelling salesman, a little younger than Eva—neat, small, pale, with slick mouse-coloured hair and a too familiar manner. He was so plainly second-rate—what mamma spoke of sadly as "inferior." He wanted Eva to keep the garage in Oak Grove and let him manage it. But that was one thing to which

papa would not agree. He had taken the garage for Rich and some of his money was still in it. Noel might have succeeded to Rich's wife and child, but he was not to have Rich's home and business as well.

The hardest thing for the Schoessels was to let little Herbert go; to feel that they would see less and less of him as he grew older. Now he was to belong almost wholly to another and alien household. The house was so terribly empty now without Herbert's miscellany of treasures—Teddy bear, one-eared rabbit, old egg-beater, little blocks of wood from the store—dribbled over all the rugs; without Herbert himself running to the door as soon as he heard his grandfather enter the house.

So much of the time now, while Marjorie was working in the house or at the old desk in the store, her mind was going over and over Rich's brief history. If he had died in battle, even . . . but just to die, among hundreds of others, to be dumped out, sent home in a pine coffin, buried and forgotten! The wound in her heart seemed to deepen instead of heal. But her anger at Eva slowly changed to a dim oppressive comprehension of the pitfalls and compulsions of existence.

The most incredible thing, the thing that kept hurting, was that this should be the end of the Rich whom she had known as a little boy. That frowning, sandy-haired, self-contained, competent little boy, who always knew just what he was going to do and was impatient with the others if they couldn't see things as quickly as he did himself. He used to say that he was going to be either an engineer or a pilot on a ship. . . . She was working at the store now that Hummer was gone. It was dark, oppressively quiet during most of the day, until people began to drive in from the country late in the afternoon and use it for a meeting- and resting-place. Sitting at the desk, or going down the row of shining new dressers with the ancient feather duster, she brooded over the thought of her brother, of Jessie. Their childhood

seemed real, but their grown-up selves queerly distorted. She herself, and all her companions, seemed to have passed, without her knowing when, out of that bright certainty of childhood into some limbo of middle youth. They, who had always felt themselves above those dreary and tragic things that older people let come to them! Now, all at once, where were they? Neva had what she wanted—Neva always did. But she thought of Jessie; of Winnie with her soft acquiescent youth and prettiness too soon worn out, working in the millinery shop that belonged to the new department store, living on the dwindling, occasional attentions of Al Bronson; Kat, a haggard frail young mother tied to her house and her children. Emily—even Emily. She had had pneumonia, and the doctor had sent her back to Colorado. It was one of those queer, in-between times. Surely it could not last—but how was it going to change?

The Schoessels had one of their periodic attic-cleanings at this time—a job that Marjorie and her mother always dreaded, but that yielded them so much interest that it always took them several days longer than they had planned; so that papa said, when he came home to supper each night: "What are you girls doing with all that junk?" They planned to "make a clean sweep" this time; but left the attic nearly as crowded as it had been before.

Marjorie came across her old burnt-wood trophy box, filled with notes, invitations to parties, post-cards from the curly-haired boy at the declamatory contest, paper napkins with names scribbled on them. There was a photograph that had been taken of the first grade, all lined up on the school steps. Even then, Harry Ryan had had to be in the very front row! There were Marjorie and Neva standing together, with the whitest ruffled aprons and the biggest hair ribbons. How funny Jessie looked with her uneven little black ringlets and Mother Hubbard dress! Poor Ivanhoe, at the end of the line, in little short pants too tight for him —no one had wanted to stand beside him. And there was

her little autograph album, with the green plush covers, that she had kept so diligently for as much as three weeks. She looked at the round vertical writing.

"DEAR MARGIE,
"Like a ring that has no end
Is my love for you dear freind,
"Your loving freind,
"GEORGE ARTHUR PATTERSON (ALIAS CHUB)."

Rich had teased Chub about that "loving freind" and shouted it after him.

"DEAR MARGIE,
"When you are tired and your husband is cross
Come over to our house and eat apple sauce.
"WINNIE."

Marjorie knelt there, under the cobwebby rafters close to the little window at which she had looked across from her perch in the tree-house—absorbed.

"You aren't going to keep that whole box, Margie?"

"Yes, I am! No—I'm going to burn the whole thing."

"Oh, isn't there something you'll be sorry you haven't kept?"

"No. I might as well burn it all at once."

Susie Belle Biggerson came into the store one Saturday. She planked her feet down just as she used to do going down the aisle at school. She wore spectacles with gold rims, a dark blue knitted tam-o'-shanter, and looked middle-aged. Susie Belle had married a farmer in Buck Creek Township—not Glenn Dale, Marjorie didn't know what had become of him—and had driven in with her three children to do the buying. She greeted Marjorie heartily, and proudly exhibited her children. There was a difference in her manner. They were equals now, Susie Belle considered, with Marjorie working in her father's store; or rather less than equals. She looked Marjorie over curiously, in spite of her hearty greeting.

"I was real sorry to see that in the paper about your

brother," she said. "My, wasn't it too bad about that Evans girl! You in the furniture store now?"

"Yes, just now," Marjorie said distantly.

"Drive out and see us some day," Susie Belle urged. "Our place ain't so wonderful, but then we like it pretty well. Last summer, I had six hundred chickens. I wish my old man'd stop in here for me. I'd like for you to meet him. You drive out when it gets warm weather—it looks nicer then."

Marjorie promised. But she walked back to the little cubby-hole where the desk stood, feeling bitterly apart. Even Susie Belle Biggerson had accomplished more than she had. It wasn't fair. Life did not seem to turn out as they had thought it must. Here, in the store, she was oppressed with the remembrance of high-school days, when the girls, in their white caps and bright hair ribbons, used to stampede the place and "jolly" with Hummer. Days when they were little girls and used to go up and down the long rows "choosing" furniture. They were *the* girls—they should have had things—everyone had expected it. She more than any of them.

She was caught in a fog and did not know how to find her way out. But it would no longer be enough to simply get away, get a job. Even this was better. It had a meaning that her brief experience in Chicago had been without. She knew that papa and mamma needed her.

4

Marjorie walked along beside her mother, silent with the wretchedness of her self-disgust. She, Marjorie, accepted into the band of the ailing: of Mrs. Fitzpatrick with all her troubles, Miss Ida Willis, Frances Patterson of whom it was said: "They don't know just what *was* the matter with her." She had rebelled against a visit to Dr. Mary Loomis, protesting that she would not be told to keep the

bowels open and go out and study the birds. She would not let mamma even mention Zelma's health baths. But even the visit to Shell Rock, that mamma had anxiously urged her to take, had done no good; although for a day or two she had liked being in that little parlour again, with its bay window and the dear old piano with the insertions of faded silk. She knew all the books in the tall walnut bookcase—*Ben Hur,* a few volumes of Dickens and George Eliot, nothing later than *Richard Carvel.* She had begun to feel a dim horror of the small dark rooms. Grandpa was almost helpless, and Aunt Bessie had to wait upon him. She could not take Marjorie to club meetings or "have in a few of the girls," as she loved to do. It was a long time since there had been one of those big Thanksgiving dinners in Shell Rock, with all of the Blossom clan assembled. Now it seemed that the life in the old house was just left over, worse than if it had been gone altogether—dwindled, darkened, closing in. Marjorie had come back so miserable that out of pure wretchedness she had consented to going with mamma to the new chiropractor whom all the ailing were visiting now.

The chiropractor had taken offices above the hardware store, reached by an outside wooden stairway. Marjorie had to undress and put on her kimono in a little dim, box-like room whose small window overlooked the dingy alleyway between the hardware store and a grocery. An old delivery horse stood there, with drooping head bowed in a terrible resignation of patience. There was a cheap dresser in the room, with a can of talcum powder and a few scattered hairpins.

Marjorie tried to conquer that feeling of dreadful humiliation when she went into the room where the chiropractor gave his treatments. He was a small, nervous, dark-faced man, trying to cover his fear of women patients with a manner of chipper encouragement.

"All righty! Now just lie down. Now we'll fix this young lady up in fine style."

Marjorie lay face downwards on the narrow table. She stiffened, resenting the little strong nervous hands poking at her spine, humiliated by the feeling of embarrassment that his cheerful, overdone manner only accentuated. "All righty now—not going to hurt. Um-*hm!* Here's a bad place!" She was not squirming because he hurt. It was her own sense of degradation, her helpless anger at hearing mamma talk over her condition with the chiropractor, impressed by his pointing out spots that "showed tenderness."

"I'll never go there again! Never!" she declared with angry tearfulness as they went down the wooden stairs with their slippery edging of icy snow.

Mamma, following cautiously, kept urging her.

"He was sure he could help you. You ought at least to give him a chance. What will he think, what are we to tell him, if you don't go on Wednesday as you said you would?"

"I didn't say so. It was you. You sat there talking me over with that awful little man. You know you did, Mamma Schoessel."

"Why, darling, mamma wants to know what's the matter with you. But if you don't like it, I won't even go with you next time. You wanted me to, to-day, you know."

"I'm not going next time."

"But you won't go to Dr. Loomis, either," mamma protested.

Marjorie muttered savagely: "I'll go to Zelma and take health baths! It couldn't be *worse,* anyway!"

"Well, if I really thought you'd get any good out of them——"

Marjorie would not answer. She stalked along the street in silence, mamma hurrying anxiously at her side, her face screwed up with distress. Mamma knew how she *hated* having her symptoms discussed, and mamma felt a little guilty over her naïve confidences with the chiropractor.

Marjorie refused to go again, refused anything that anyone suggested. But secretly she knew that she must clutch at something to get herself out of this dark state of mysteri-

ous suffering, and her defence was weakening. Mamma and papa began to talk anxiously about Rochester. She protested wildly at first—she, who had scorned the women who came home and talked impressively of operations. She had held herself proudly above those middle-aged discussions of illnesses and operations, the dreadful retailing of symptoms. She and Jessie used to retort airily, when Mrs. Evans predicted gloomily that they "might have something, too, some day": "We aren't ever *go*-ing to have anything! So there!" And now she was sunk under the humiliation of finding herself, and her own symptoms, the subject of those same discussions. Mamma's friends found a new interest in her, accepted her as one of themselves. It would mean no more to submit to the final indignity of going to Rochester. Quite suddenly, to the amazement of her family, she declared that she would go with Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who was visiting the clinic (as she said with a good deal of self-congratulation) for the fifth time.

Chapter IV

I

EVER since she had come back, a restlessness had possessed her. It was early spring now. There was a sense of mingled softness and chilly sharpness, with a little hard ridge of snow against the wall of the furniture store slowly melting, grain by grain, and seeping into the thick black earth. How could she breathe in the house? She stood at the window in the living-room and looked across the lawn toward old Mrs. Putz' house. The ground was spongy. A little pool, dark and bright, stayed in the lowest part of the lawn. It was as if, through the closed window, she could smell the spring dampness at the roots of the syringa-bush. There was a chill in all the shady places; in the little corner where the wall of the living-room projected beyond that of the kitchen, and where a hard, dingy triangle of snow lay. But the air had the dark, troubling softness of March.

Mamma would not go out, except to make a little trip down town later in the afternoon. It was so sloppy underfoot. Marjorie could not stand the house. She craved the feeling of the woods and pastures, as she had done years ago when all the little girls had been out after wild flowers as soon as school was over. It was too early for blossoms yet, even for the furry wind-flowers that grew in the cinders along the track.

"Where on earth are you going, Margie?"

"Oh, somewhere!" she answered restlessly.

"Put on your rubbers if you're going far!" her mother called after her anxiously.

Marjorie made a childish little face. But she got her rubbers out of the hall closet and put them on, remembering how it had once been a chief ambition of hers to get out of the house before mamma should see that she didn't have them. That experience in Chicago, living on her own money, had taught her that shoes must be saved. She had come to wearing rubbers—of her own accord.

When she was once outside, she did not know where she wanted to go. To the store? She might play the Victrola, she supposed. But what she really wanted was to get outside, past the houses and the little confining network of streets. She went over to the Putz house and persuaded Orpha to go with her to the pasture south of town and find water cress, since there were no flowers out yet. Orpha demurred, thought she ought not to leave her mother; but at last, under Marjorie's coaxing persuasion, she rummaged around in the back entry until she found a shiny pail for the cress.

"You can come," Marjorie urged. "It's your duty to the health of the family to get some nice fresh green stuff. It feels so good out, Orpha!"

"Well, maybe I can go for just a little while," Orpha said wistfully.

They went out with the shiny pail and a butcher knife wrapped in brown paper. Orpha looked queer and out-of-date with her ancient light covert-coat with gathered sleeves, her little winter hat, her high shoes and big rubbers.

But somehow Orpha, and her old clothes, suited the quiet spreading pasture where the sun was warm on the slopes, but the limestone that cropped through the rich ground kept its ancient chill. The hill-side was still dead brown, the trees bare, the bright little creek went narrow and cold between its shaggy banks. The water cress had come early this year. Mats of it filled the stream—green, chill, the leaf edges tinged with purple. Marjorie leaned over perilously from the caving bank and pulled at the matted stems. Her hand came out of the water icy-fresh and

pink. The blood tingled as she rubbed the hand with the little towel that Orpha had brought, and then held it up to catch the treacherous warmth of the sun. Windless sunlight lay on the slopes where a motionless tree cast one clear shadow.

But the sunlit slopes were not enough—the dry stalks of milkweed, motionless and stiff, holding their empty greyish pods up into the quiet of the spring sky. She looked off toward the grey-black mass of oaks and hickories along the farther slope, to the road that lay beyond the barbed-wire fence half entangled in weeds, with a queer sense of expectation. This was beautiful—she could see it again. But nothing was enough, just in itself.

She put on her wraps one day and walked out beyond the paving, led by an inquietude that had in it a vague sense of beauty. Well as she knew the town, this place seemed new and strange to her to-day. The walk stopped just at the city limits. There was an old brick house, with evergreens in the yard, and a fence painted grey. Beyond that, a small cornfield. A plank led up a little slope to the wire fence around the field. The old dead stalks, cut and trampled, stood up from the soft dark mud. The sky was a rainy grey, louring and mild. But there was a freshness, a stillness, that came from the sodden corn, from the evergreens dark and motionless behind the wooden fence. It came from without; and then it seemed to have entered her, to be growing within her. She wanted to do something—at once, that moment. To possess this beauty, not just to feel it. She *must*.

When she got home, the house was so familiar, so little and confining—as if she could break the walls in her hands. But she loved the house.

2

People were saying: "How much better Marjorie looks!" She knew it, felt it. She was interested in clothes again—even in dressing for those stuffy card parties where the

women sat with flushed cheeks and eager eyes in overheated rooms. She made everything feed that growing sense of life. As she lay in bed, she could feel the stir of life in her breast, could feel it tingling in her finger-tips. The smooth touch of the cool sheet, of the air from her open window that looked out on the green maple-tree, was caressing.

Going to Rochester had been the worst. But after she had once given in, decided, she had not minded it so much. After all, there had been a dim consolation in the perception that this was the way life seemed to go. Mrs. B. T. Patterson had tried to give encouragement by telling of the time when she had weighed only ninety-one pounds and her parents had thought she was going into a decline—"And look at me now!" Mrs. Patterson had cried, laughing, her three chins shaking with a rich comfort. Most of the girls, her own friends, seemed to reach a stage when there was a break between youth and maturity, when everything was at a standstill. Even Emily—living at home all the last two years, with her older sister doing everything for her, and detesting her home all the time. But Emily was out now. She had gone to Seattle. She was writing, getting things published; and her letters had mysterious, exciting hints about an "affair" . . . And then the journey with Mrs. Fitzpatrick, the dreadful tests, the giving up of her self and her own fastidiousness, one of a herd of ailing people—she had been able to stand it. Even the discussions in the lobby of the little family hotel where she and Mrs. Fitz. had stayed. They had shared a room. Marjorie had felt the frankness of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's dressing and undressing and relation of symptoms not quite becoming in one of the older generation—had turned away her eyes when Mrs. Fitz., withered and sprightly, clad in her funny little tight brassière and black woollen bloomers, took off her switch and uncoiled it on the dresser, got it ready to be pinned on the next day, braided her tiny little spears of reddish-grey hair.

"Oh, you mustn't be so shy, Marjorie! You'll get over that before you get as old as I am. There's a lot of things in the world, I'll tell you, that aren't so pleasant as we'd like to make out!" Mrs. Fitz. had told her.

She remembered the miscellaneous crowd pouring all day through the medical building—that huge fat Indian wearing a splendid fur coat over his blue overalls . . . the fat old man beside whom she had sat in the clinic and listened, with a reluctant sense of the companionship of human frailty, to a long and prideful account of his stomach trouble. She had played rummy in the lobby with a railroad man from Indiana who declared proudly that he had three tonsils and that the doctors didn't know how to account for him. Then she had had two teeth and her tonsils out. It was as if the little operation, the shock, the change, had been a turning-point. It had mysteriously rid her of old shocks—of the war, Rich's death, her old submissions and bewilderments and failures.

Her feeling of obscure humiliation and doubt slowly gave way to the old youthful feeling of definite expectation. There was a meaning again in all that she did—even when she brushed her hair, when she leaned toward the mirror and looked into the shallow brown of her eyes. She threw her long glossy braid over her shoulder, wondering if she wanted it cut. All at once a memory came back of the woods in Reeds Grove. She could smell the nuts and the dry leaves, hear the voices down by the creek. . . .

She must seize something quickly, quickly. This was not the slim, fresh, delicate prettiness of her school-days. Her face was fuller, smoothed out, the fragile angles rounded. There was something full-blown about the softness of her face.

3

Marjorie sat in Arnette's room in the courthouse, restlessly glancing through pamphlets on the care of the teeth, then wandered over to the window and stared down at

cars parked along the iron railing. Arnette was talking to the women who came to inquire about their children's eyes and tonsils. Arnette was the new county nurse. Marjorie did not really care for her, any more than she had cared for Anne. All that held them together was that they both wanted to break out, that they were not satisfied to be like the other girls in the card club—like Frances Patterson with her ailments and her plaintive smile and hidden jealousies. In the intervals between calls, their conversation continued.

"Gosh, I'm sick of this rural stuff! Telling people what's the matter with their kids and then having them come back at you—'Well, the doctor didn't say that!' I think they have the simpiest lot of doctors in this town. Come and go West," Arnette urged. "Let's get out of here."

"Yes, but you've got nursing," Marjorie protested. "What would I do if I went?"

"Heavens, child! There are a thousand things you could do. Let's go out to Oregon. I bet you anything you want to say that we'd have jobs inside of a week. I don't want to nurse. I'd like to get into something else."

"But you could do it if you had to."

"Well, you could make funeral bouquets if you had to."

It was exciting to play with the idea of going West with Arnette . . . sitting here, away up in the courthouse, and watching the branches move against the sky. But she knew what underlay all Arnette's restlessness and plans. She knew it, looking at Arnette, at her big buxom figure and fuzzy blond hair, the glint of her eyes. When Arnette had been on one of her trips to Leland or Byron, she came back talking exultantly of "some man" who had helped her to get the coupé out of the mud, or to put on a tire. Arnette always managed to make a mystery of these things. Marjorie remembered one of these expeditions, when the coupé had to be pulled out of the ditch by a team of farm horses: the story Arnette had made of it at the club. "Marge and I had an adventure on our way to Leland. Oh, we aren't

telling, are we, Marge? We might have been sitting there in the middle of the ditch yet if it hadn't been for a certain person!" And then the other girls had chimed in: "Is *that* what you do when you go out in the coupé!" And the silly part was that it had been only Mr. Kloster, who lived near Leland—a middle-aged farmer with a creased red neck and several children. Marjorie had often seen him in the store.

She did not know exactly why she herself liked to talk about the West—why a job there should be better, particularly, than a job here. Certainly it was not just "a job" that she wanted. But she knew Buena Vista so well. It seemed to her that nothing new could happen to her here. There was no man in whom she could possibly be interested, without turning all her old desires into complete compromise. She could never be like Arnette, who liked to have any man talk to her—"anything in trousers," the other girls said. . . . Looking down from the high window at the pavement along which cars and trucks bowled smoothly, and a few old horses drew battered wagons, Marjorie hated the little town because she knew it so well. It was something new that she must have.

"Come on," Arnette said, "let's take the coop and get out of here before any more fond mammas come."

They drove at a crazy pace down the road toward Leland, the wheels of the worn little car sending up a spatter of gravel. While Arnette went into a farm-house where there was illness, Marjorie sat out in the car nibbling life-savers.

April. A blue languorous day of warm wind and sunlight. The country roads were dried to a powdery brown, the old long grass was pale gold and glossy on the slopes. The willow-trees seemed still, but the upper branches with their tiny leaves were moving softly. Marjorie sat out in the farm-yard waiting. The motor was on, pumping water that gushed brightly through the slanting trough. A yellow cat flumped down and rolled in the dry warm dust.

A rooster crowed . . . a lazy, drawn-out, country sound. In the short grass there were already a few bright yellow dandelions sticky with freshness.

She thought of that day at Plymouth . . . with the white steeples, the blue sea darkening toward the centre. It was long ago, almost in another life. It would not be enough, now, simply to "go somewhere" with Emily. She could not let things go on budding, the bright green grass come through the old grass, and she have nothing—nothing to catch all this delight and somehow make it her own.

Chapter V

I

"AREN'T you eating anything, Ed?"

"I'm not hungry."

"You ought to be," mamma told him a little querulously. "You've been working all morning. I don't see why you won't go and see Dr. Loomis as I've told you. If you aren't going to eat."

He did not answer. After a few minutes, he pushed back his chair and went into the living-room.

"I don't see why he doesn't eat," mamma complained.

Marjorie said nothing. She sat on at the table, sticking her fork into a little piece of sweet pickle left on her plate and pricking out a pattern. But when she glanced at her mother's face, and saw that it was thoughtful, slightly frowning and yet quiet, she turned away her eyes guiltily. She was relieved when mamma rose abruptly and went into the living-room.

She took the dishes out into the kitchen. It was sunny there, the house was still. She could put away for a while longer the realization of her father that had been nagging at her for a long time now, coming in to spoil the plans that were dimly forming in her consciousness . . . the look she had seen on his face sometimes in the evenings when he sat near the light holding the paper but with his eyes closed; what Bud had told her about the "spell" he had had coming back from the Henderson girl's funeral. Bud knew that papa was not well, he worried a little sometimes. So did mamma, urged him to "see someone." But they had all been busy, self-absorbed, tacitly willing to let papa put off

definite statement of not being well as long as he could—papa most of all. He hated any fuss so. It was a poor time, with Bud just starting in business. She heard nothing from the living-room. She could submerge herself again in the sensation—painful, sweet, restless, expectant—in which all her secret being was moving.

She put away the dishes in the clean, orderly cupboard, hung up her towel, and left the kitchen. In the dining-room she paused, startled. A low murmur of voices came from the living-room. Papa had not gone back to the store. He was never late. He always took the car and went at once after dinner so that Bud could come home. She had never known him to stay as long as this before.

She went silently back to the kitchen, and stood for a moment in the outer doorway. Summer light fresh on the grass and the flowers in the back yard seemed to deny her fear. The car stood out near the barn. She was almost angry because papa had not gone. There had been so much . . . mamma and then Rich, then herself. Grandpa and Grandma Blossom. She was afraid to let her sense of papa's pallor, the baggy look of his cheeks, the stoop of his shoulders, spoil those new resolves, dim and yet eager, in her secret mind.

Her mother called: "Marjorie!"

She went quickly into the living-room. Papa had gone upstairs, but mamma stood there anxious and excited. Marjorie murmured through stiff lips: "Is anything the matter with papa?"

"He says he really feels badly. He couldn't go back to the store. He thinks it's no use to see Dr. Loomis. We're both going up to Rochester to-night."

There was such confusion, such hurry. Now that it had finally come to this, papa wanted to go at once, before anyone should know that he was leaving. Mamma called Bud, he closed the store and came home. They had no time for realization. All that afternoon, while Marjorie worked in the kitchen, hurriedly washing out a blouse and some hand-

kerchiefs for her mother, her whole mind was concentrated in protest against the dreary familiarity of illness and grief and pain again. She would not admit it, allied herself with all that denied it—the dancing glint of light on the bright steel of the faucets, the warm feel of the rainbow-tinted soap-suds, the scent of summer that came in through the open door.

Papa wanted no one to know where they were going. He had been concerned, anxious, when he had sent off his wife and then his daughter on the same errand; but he felt a furtive disgrace that he, the man, the dependable one, should submit to this. He tried to make their going a casual affair. A short wait near the door of the depot while Bud got their tickets . . . and then Bud's hurried "I guess it's coming. Right on time!" They were out on the platform. All were constrained, trying to act as usual and not look anxious, Bud carrying the hastily packed bags. Papa wanted no one to notice him. When Tom Patterson, getting off the smoker with the travelling men, stopped to ask in surprise: "Going away, Ed?" he answered with a gruff casualness, not looking at Tom: "Yes, for a day or two." It was too late for the instructions, the anxious questions that mamma thought of at the last minute—"Don't forget the plants—well, I'll write you, darling . . ." Mamma was hurried on to the train. There was a brief sight of them pausing to look for seats. They were gone. Marjorie and Bud turned away together.

They drove most of the way in silence. Once Bud blurted out: "Gee—I don't know! I'm afraid papa was worse off than he let on."

"He's been at the store right along," Marjorie protested.

"I know it, but that's the way papa is. He never makes any fuss unless he has to. Gee, I don't know. I could have got along at the store. I wish he'd gone sooner. Wish I'd—oh, well, how're you going to know what to do all the time?"

Marjorie did not answer.

"Want me to leave you at home, Marge? Guess I'll have to go back and open up the store again."

"I don't care. Yes, you might as well."

Opening the front door, going alone into the empty hall, she had the sensation of having come back after a long journey. The warm blank silence of the house flooded about her with a terrible significance. Bud's few anxious words had cut into her mind. She could see, with painful sharpness, mamma and papa in that final little glimpse, standing uncertainly in the aisle and looking over the heads of the indifferent, self-absorbed people who filled the seats . . . both elderly, a nice, elderly, small-town couple. . . . Everything so hurried, reluctant. Papa . . . But nothing could happen to papa. He had always been there, going quietly about his work, supplying what was needed, back of all that she and mamma had ever done—the final security. The intimacy of the quiet house, homelike, a little disordered, the vines fresh and summery on the porch, confirmed her old unthinking trust . . . lightning could not touch them if papa was in the house; Uncle Will Risser's big horses could not run away with them; the end of the world—which used to terrify her secretly when she and Jessie discussed it in the tree-house—could not really come.

2

Marjorie looked out with eager eyes at the country through which she was passing. Going West . . . all the changes, going from the rolling smoothness of Iowa to the harsher flatness of Nebraska and Kansas, seeing the full, tree-bordered rivers give way to sandy shallow streams, the rich prairies to yellow plains. Then the first, dim, lilac-blue of distant mountains. There was something in the very feeling of the West—the hard vigour, the openness, the colours thin and pure and vivid—that she wanted; that had drawn her with a sudden expectancy at times in those futile hours up in the courthouse with Arnette.

The moment that she had stepped on to the train at Buena Vista, it was as if she had been miraculously freed from all the anxiety and dreariness. Papa's first acceptance of the verdict at Rochester—that he had waited too long before coming—had worn away. A sick craving had come over him to go somewhere else. All his life, he had wanted and intended to go some day to see Albert Blossom in Denver, to see the West. He had been able to talk of nothing but Denver. After their first fear of the long journey, the change of altitude, the others had begun saying: "Maybe he'll be all right if we can just get him out there." After they had gone, mamma wrote that he had stood the journey better than anyone could have believed. He had seemed to "pick up" the moment he reached Denver. Uncle Albert and Aunt Mary did everything for him. The new doctor seemed to be hopeful. They were to stay indefinitely. Marjorie was to come. Denver would work the miracle.

A big boy in a sombrero hat, and with a shy, friendly grin, met her at the station in Denver—her cousin Ted.

"This is Marjorie, isn't it?"

"Oh, is it Ted?"

"You look just the way I thought you would. You look like those pictures Aunt Etta sent us. We've got to go across here to get the car."

She asked quickly, as they dodged across an open space: "How is my father?"

"Well, they seem to think he's getting along pretty well. They'll be pretty glad to see you, though, I guess."

She sat back, as Ted manœuvred the car out of the crowded line, momentarily content with his assurance after that sudden thrust of terror she had felt when she asked about papa. She looked eagerly out at the wide clean streets, the dim jagged bank of mountains that appeared and disappeared beyond vacant lots, at the end of long streets lined with cottonwoods. Ted's skin was tanned to the colour of his light felt sombrero. He and his younger brother

Rex were managing the garage in which Uncle Albert had lately invested.

The yellow brick house, of good size and rather old-fashioned, stood close to a rough stretch of plains. The lawn was bright green with red dahlias burning in the dry heat. Uncle Albert came out to meet them, and Marjorie could see Aunt Mary smiling and waiting in the doorway.

"Well, well, well! So this is the girl, is it? Got you out here at last!"

It was all eager welcome—nothing could be wrong. Aunt Mary's arms were around her, then her mother's. Then she was in the living-room, saw her father raising himself slowly from a big chair near the window. "Well, Margie —you came out too?" She replied to his feeble smiling question, kissed him. And all the time that others were talking, asking her eagerly about her journey, whether Ted had had any trouble in finding her, she fought down her shocked realization that papa was even feebler than he had been when he left home.

Was it possible that they didn't see, didn't realize? But the sharpness of her own realization gradually became dimmer, uncertain, before their cheerfulness. In a little while, she did not know whether she had actually seen that change. When she stood for a few moments alone with mamma in her bedroom, mamma asked with a brief anxiety: "What do you think about papa?" then went on quickly, without waiting for an answer, to tell eagerly about the new doctor, the serum, the diet. Uncle Albert was jovial, Aunt Mary gently smiling and calm. Papa himself seemed to acquiesce in the belief that he was getting better. Uncle Albert made Marjorie come out with him to see his watering system and his plants. She stood, pretending to listen, but looking eagerly off across the rough plains at scattered houses set among dusty, glittering cottonwoods, feeling the clear vivid burning of the air. The dim blue chain of mountains, duskily shadowed, streaked with silver, elated her. She wanted to believe that everything would be dif-

ferent here. "Finest place in the world," Uncle Albert assured her; and he added in a low confidential tone: "Oh, your father's going to be all right out here. Sure—of course he is. We'll keep him out here—keep all of you. He'll begin to really enjoy things when we can take him around a little bit. Why doesn't Bessie come out here instead of sticking back there in Iowa?"

She was the only one of his guests upon whom Uncle Albert could shower his hospitality and his pride in the West; the only one who could enjoy the rides and tramps and sightseeing that he had been promising in letters for years. They all kept up the assurance that soon papa would be able to enjoy them too. Uncle Albert was not willing to have Marjorie spend a day at home; and when he could think of nothing else for her to do, drove around with the car, shouted "Hop in!" and made her go with him to the new garage to see how much business the boys had done to-day. They drove down wide bright streets, along hard yellow roads where cottonwoods rattled their shining leaves. Marjorie entered into it all recklessly, eagerly, snatching what she could get, trying to throw off her old scruples and fastidiousness. She would not think beneath what the doctor, Uncle Albert, all of them said; would not let the thought of papa spoil the blue of the mountains, the vivid burning of the air . . . not yet. She would not let the realization of papa sitting silently and feebly in the chair beside the window, or lying on the couch, sink into her mind and have to be considered. She did not want to go home. There was something here that she must have.

Uncle Albert stayed at the garage so that the boys could take Marjorie into the mountains. Six of them went —two girls whom Ted and Rex knew, and a young friend of Ted's who travelled for an automobile accessory house. The mountain air was exhilarating, sharp and thin. They drove close to the rocky wall of the canyon. The creek rushed along below them, struck foamily against the brown

rocks and showed the pebbles bright under the water. The air was dry and pure, the pines were dark on the steep slopes, the coldness of the water and the turquoise of the sky were beautiful. Farther up the canyon lay a wide valley where the grass was long and green, and horses were grazing.

Marjorie hunted eagerly for little dry pine twigs and let Len Pooley show her how to make an Indian fire. They cooked beefsteak over it, and the boys brought up chill dripping bottles of ginger ale that they had wedged in between rocks in the creek. They had an hilarious picnic dinner. Cars sped past on the narrow road, around the turn, the people turning often to wave at them. . . . It was untrue, all the hilarity that was so small and reckless and gay in the midst of this great surrounding beauty. There was something perilous, sorrowful, under it. But she was going to snatch it, have it.

Marjorie and Len Pooley climbed up the slope of the foothill a little way. They sat down, in the windy stillness, under a small crooked pine. Dry brown needles were scattered thinly over the rocky ground. There was only one flower that Marjorie could see—a blue harebell growing delicately among the thin grass and the bleached pale stones. She would not let Len Pooley climb up to pick it for her. It was better to have it there, close, accessible but untouched, trembling in the faint wind. The pines across from them were dusky and hot against the blue.

Len Pooley was not so much a person to her as a necessary part of the happiness of the day. She would not permit herself to really think about the things he was telling her of his job, his "territory," his boss. She liked to have him wear a wide-brimmed Western hat and to have thin sunburnt hands. She need not really think about him. But as he lay on the slope beside her, digging up little stones with his knife and talking about his job, thinking she was more interested in it than she was, she knew that his being there was what made everything complete.

It was evening when they drove back. A chill came from the creek in the dusk. Marjorie could feel the pressure of Len Pooley's hand feeling for hers, stealthily and yet with a kind of innocence about it, as she sat squeezed in beside him in the back seat with Ted and Helen. The boys sang as they drove along the hard white road into the city.

Marjorie ran softly up the stairs to her room. The boys were putting away the car. She did not turn on her light for a moment, but stood looking out at the blue night, the moon hanging like a silver bangle above the wide plains. The old satisfaction, the old beauty, was back with her . . . stirring with her breathing, warm and tingling in her fingertips.

A figure came dimly into the room—mamma.

"Margie, I'm so glad you've got back. I've been talking to papa. He says he wants to go home. This isn't doing him any good at all."

Mamma began to cry.

3

There was no time now for thought of anyone but papa. All the other things that had kept them so busy, absorbed—the hope and pleasure in the journey, Uncle Albert's assurances, mamma's little shopping expeditions with Aunt Mary, Marjorie's eager excursions—dropped away, unimportant, nothing.

All at once papa was feeble, broken. He made no pretence of trying to keep up, of finding interest in anything about him. All his life he had been looking forward to this trip. When things grew too monotonous, or too complicated at the store, he used to stop and think: "Well, some day when I've got things in better shape, I'll go out West to Denver and see Albert." Now it was too late. He only wanted to get home.

The household was given over to papa now that they

had come back to Buena Vista. There were offers of help from so many people. Hummer came; and it seemed now that he was back in the old relationship to them. He would do anything—keep the store going, look after the funerals for Bud. There were telephone calls, visits, from people in the country and little towns, who had bought their furniture at the store or had Ed Schoessel conduct funerals in their families. Marjorie never went out of the house that some farmer driving into town did not stop and ask her how her father was. The Schoessel furniture store had gradually become one of the landmarks of Buena Vista. Mr. Phillips wrote from Florida and sent a box of fruit. Mr. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Willis and two of the Pattersons had been at the station to help when the Schoessels came back from Denver. Papa had had, after all, his meed of appreciation—his quietness, his lack of assertion, had not concealed what he was. People knew.

His own family tried to do the few things that were left that could give him pleasure. It had been years since any of them had gone to Germantown—not since the old people had died. Papa had almost lost touch with his old home. But he wanted Aunt Lottie now. Marjorie went to the train to meet her. She stood back on the platform watching for Aunt Lottie to get off among the little trickle of Buena Vista passengers. There Aunt Lottie was—a fat shapeless middle-aged woman, in old-fashioned clothes, getting down with a heavy, sideways motion from the last step, standing helplessly and looking timidly about. Marjorie went up to her; and then she felt for the first time a kinship as she looked into Aunt Lottie's eyes, mild and light like papa's, and kissed her soft fresh-coloured cheek.

During those last few days in Denver, and on the journey, papa had been querulous, given up to sickness. But now that he was at home, that he was not trying to be well, he was himself again. Quiet, undemonstrative as ever; but he was grateful, as if with a little astonishment and appreciation, for all that they did for him. Once when Marjorie

brought him some water for which he had asked, he took her hand, pressed it gently, and said: "Thank you, little Margie." Tears came quickly into Marjorie's eyes. She gave him a quick smile and turned away her face as she set down the glass. She hurried out into the hall and stood for a moment at the head of the stairs. The tears were still in her eyes, blurring the light that shone from the landing across the lower steps, a block of dusty gold, homelike, familiar. She leaned back against the wall, trying to get strength from its hardness to fight back the tears that kept welling. . . . Papa was still planning for them. He remembered what clothes they would need for the winter. He thought of Eva. They knew that he wanted to see Herbert, but Eva and Noel had moved out to the Western coast, they were too far away to come. Papa did not talk about the store. On the day when he had come home at noon and not gone back, he had tacitly given up the store and left it to Bud.

A friendship and silent understanding grew between Marjorie and Aunt Lottie. They were together often while mamma was with papa. Papa had always been Aunt Lottie's favourite brother, the one of whom she was proud. She liked to talk about him. Through Aunt Lottie's shy, gentle speech Marjorie saw her father's life more clearly than she had ever comprehended it before. It was not that Aunt Lottie told her so much about him, directly; it was that in Aunt Lottie's naïve references to him he came to stand out as a person—not papa, but a human being in his own right. He used to take Aunt Lottie to the country school and protect her from the fierce dog at that old German's farm that they passed. He had always wanted to study Latin. Once when he was a boy, he had saved up money for over a year to buy a clarinet—he had wanted to learn a musical instrument, Aunt Lottie said. Grandpa didn't want him to play, because he thought it was taking time from the farm work; and Aunt Lottie used to keep guard while he practised out in a little corn-crib away from the house. He

used to walk the six miles to town to play in the orchestra that old "Yulius" Wendt had conducted in the back room of his cobbler shop—Marjorie remembered that thin, very clean, white-haired, rosy-faced old man with silver-rimmed spectacles and a black cambric skull-cap, his little shop with a smell of iron and leather and blacking, and a row of bright geraniums on the window-sill. The old dog at the farm, Major, had liked papa better than anyone. When Major was so old and blind that he would scarcely move to get his food, he had run out to the gate, limping and barking, the very instant that he had heard papa's voice in the driveway. Grandpa had wanted papa to "hire out" and papa had gone off to Shell Rock and worked in the lumber-yard instead. Aunt Lottie spoke with soft pride and wonder of all that papa had done for himself—built up this fine business, this good home, given his children an education, all the things that he had missed. Papa's life had had its own achievements, its own satisfactions, after all.

But it seemed to Marjorie that they must be able to stop time from going on helplessly like this. They did nothing—time went on—they were letting it be true. A little while ago, the thought that the family could exist without papa had not been credible. But already, by slow, painful, imperceptible degrees, they were thinking of life without him. Still, as long as papa was alive, he was papa. He was there. Dependence upon him was not quite gone. Even the last two days when he lay unconscious. His eyes were closed, he did not even answer when they spoke, they were uncertain whether he heard them. But the hand that they touched had still a faint warmth. It was as if there were a great break never to be spanned between the two moments—that when papa was still with them and that (strange blank moment) when he was not.

4

That bustle of death in the house again. Even in the

ringing of the door-bell something careful, subdued, aware. Low murmurs on the porch, and then a silence just before the door was opened. People came in, with faint smiles of distress, their eyes turned self-consciously away or looking straight at the one to whom they talked with a false, innocent candour drained of all expression; and there was the embarrassment of meeting their queer formality. These things broke irritatingly into the long tensity of suffering, yet with a certain welcome. The old friends of the family stood out in dramatic relief, unmistakably recognized: the Fitzpatricks, B. T. Patterson, the Willises, Orpha Putz, Hummer; and there was something like consolation in helpless trust and dependence upon them.

Hummer was back in the house, the break in his long relationship with the family temporarily healed and as if it had never been. Mamma, lying down in the room above with Marjorie sitting silently beside her on the bed, hearing those significant softened noises below, the tread of men, voices suddenly raised for an order, a greeting . . . fumblingly tightened her weak grasp of Marjorie's hand and murmured: "I'm so glad we have Homer to attend to all this for us."

Time passed, moment after moment with relentless precision, rasping, tightening their endurance that shook and yet held through. The time of waiting in mamma's room, going softly to the door to speak to Orpha or Aunt Bessie, then suddenly dropping all feeling and talking in their usual voices of little things that ought to be done, little happenings . . . was passing. Aunt Bessie came to the door. Her voice was hushed and momentous.

"Homer says that you can come now."

The familiar stairway led down breathlessly to the silent hall. The steps were hard, separate, shining, the grain of the wood relentlessly clear. Outside the window on the landing the bare branches of the maple spread motionless. Mamma clung to Bud. There was a sturdy, waiting, considerate strength in his footsteps as he paused on this step,

then on that, until she could fit the trusting weakness of her steps to his. Aunt Bessie stole little anxious glances at Marjorie, and would have taken her hand if Marjorie had not held rigidly away. Aunt Lottie was a little way behind them, moving timidly. She would not obtrude even an attempt at comfort. The sound of her crying was soft, remote, all to herself, making no demands.

Hummer was standing near the parlour door. He, too, put up that careful defence of formality. His heavy face was solemn, he made no movement of recognition as he silently opened the parlour door for them. But there was a blurred look about his eyes under the rough thick eyebrows.

Now this moment had come. The room was queer, confusing at first, with a wide still emptiness in the centre, chairs set back out of the way. Sweet, heavy scent of flowers held the air motionless. Beyond the windows, with their familiar homelike drapes and white curtains, people passed along the sidewalk, at first absorbed and unconscious, then going slowly while they looked at the house, remembered, said something in a lowered startled tone. In the room itself, there was only the subdued movement forward of the little company, stopping, someone stepping softly nearer, the creak of Aunt Lottie's shoes, the sound of breathing.

The thought that it was Hummer who had placed the flowers there gave a kind of intimacy to the massed, hothouse freshness of the pale roses, to the stiff wreaths. Marjorie stood reluctant, drawing herself up fearfully to escape Aunt Bessie's touch. But now she was not afraid. Even the still, ceremonious air of the parlour, thick with scent of flowers, was not terrible. There was a mysterious fitness, a beauty, in the quietness of her father's face. It had his own mild, self-contained look—only enhanced, as the beauty of a sculptured face is enhanced by its immobility. That quality which he had not asserted, not demanded to have recognized, was at the end revealed un-

mistakably in the calm acceptant quietude of his face. Now they could see his essential goodness. It had needed, after all, no assertion. A sentence broken off, a murmured answer, a poignant stillness . . . they saw, they knew. Hummer, standing back, deferential, a little anxious, confirmed their recognition.

All through the difficult things that followed—the coming of many people, the short ceremonies in the parlour and in the quiet cemetery where a few brown leaves were scattered over the mounds . . . that last look of her father's stayed with Marjorie. Like a strain of music, giving a nobility to every simple act.

Making even little things bearable: Hummer's naïve pride in having the family pleased with his "work"; Mrs. Fitzpatrick's saying: "I wouldn't tell your mother at a time like this, but the other Pattersons were quite offended because he wasn't asked to be one of the pall-bearers," and Bud's hot assertion that the Pattersons had not come to Rich's funeral.

It stayed with her through that week, through the inevitable details and arrangements and business that followed death, the dreariness of aftermath. It made her able to think with only a large wonder—as she stood alone at the kitchen window, looking out at the big maple—of how her familiar world had changed. The girls scattered, Hummer gone from the store—now papa gone from it, too. The store, which had seemed fixed for ever, the centre of her world, was changed. The fringes of that world were altered too—Aunt Clara and Ethel gone from Wahseta and living together in light-housekeeping rooms in Des Moines, May married to an elderly widower with three children; Aunt Bessie saying she must get rid of the old white house in Shell Rock. People whom she did not know were living in the Cole house. The Coles were settled on the Coast, near Neva, the jewellery store sold—Mrs. Cole had at last succeeded in her long attempt at "getting him out there for good." The Phillips house was closed, Mr. and Mrs.

Phillips spending nearly all their time in Florida. The tree-house in the big shaggy maple—bare now, except for a few clinging withered leaves—had nothing left of it but some broken planks, stained dark with rain and frost, two or three broken steps nailed to the rough bark.

Chapter VI

I

FOR days mamma and Aunt Bessie had been talking about going over to look at the Hansons' bungalow. The Hansons were going to be obliged to sell. Tom Hanson had taken Mr. Bush's place as station agent when the Bushes had finally left Buena Vista to settle on that fruit farm they had bought in Alabama; but now he was to be moved on to Wahseta. "We ought to go over and look at that house before someone else buys it." "Well, of course it can't do any harm to look. We should have called on her, anyway." The reluctance felt secretly by each one of them—mamma to give up the home where she had raised her children and spent most of her married life, Aunt Bessie to actually drop all ties with Shell Rock, Marjorie to commit herself to her mother and Buena Vista—was hidden under these evasive phrases. At last there was no excuse for not going.

Marjorie walked just a little behind her mother and Aunt Bessie as they went down the street. She would not quite yield herself to their errand. She looked with a cold, averse, level gaze at the bungalow that stood shining and new under the bright winter sun, the snow melted and dripping brightly off the porch railing, the thin glazed patches of thaw on the lawn giving off a bluish dazzle. Little elm-trees had been set out along the curbing.

Mamma said half fretfully as they went up the walk to the porch: "I don't know whether I like a bungalow not having an upstairs."

"Well, of course this does have two rooms upstairs, Etta."

"But without any attic. Would they be of any use in the summer?"

But she gave a sigh, and rang the bronze door-bell. They could hear a scurry inside the house, a long pause, then steps coming slowly and decorously to the door. Through the greeting that followed—the exclamations of surprise, pleasure, apology, deprecation—Marjorie was silent, giving only a slight smile at the end because her aversion to their errand would not let her quite withhold appreciation of Mrs. Hanson's flushed, young, ingenuous face and of the round startled blue eyes of the two-year-old in rompers. They sat for a while in the living-room, all setting aside their real purpose politely and with a certain embarrassment, Mrs. Hanson apologizing breathlessly for her house dress and picking up when she could some of the baby's scattered playthings. The living-room, with its shining floor and rough tinted walls, the great splash of winter sunshine that was bright without warmth, the constrained murmurs of the women and the occasional irrelevant piping of the child, had a certain barrenness. Marjorie looked coldly at the few pieces of modern furniture, the Victrola with the door open and a few of the records pulled out upon the floor by the baby. She stared out of the window at the new little elm-tree spreading out a delicate pattern of branches upon the dazzling blue of the sky, to quiet the faint raw stirring of pain that came from the remembrance of Rich's house in Oak Grove. Beyond the colonnade, they could see the small round dining-table with the baby's thick little bowl and mug on the slightly rumpled table-cloth of unbleached muslin.

"I'm real ashamed of how the house looks to-day," Mrs. Hanson said with a nervous little laugh. "But you know we're going to move, and so I've just kind of been letting things go."

"Oh, yes! I heard that you were going. Well, that's too bad—we shall be sorry to lose you now that we're just beginning to know you. It's too bad that you have to sell

your new home just when you've got settled in it."

"*We* think it's too bad. We just like our house so well. Our trees are just beginning to grow out in front . . . but of course it's a better position for Tom, and we feel like we have to go."

"Oh, of course." Silence. Then mamma said with a tentative blandness that made Marjorie blush: "Would you —uh—care to let us look over the house?" She added hastily: "I don't suppose that we care to—but we've been thinking a little *bit* of a smaller house, ours is getting to be quite a burden." She sighed, then gave a small, difficult smile. Aunt Bessie put in gently: "So many people are building the smaller houses now."

"Oh, certainly! I'd be glad to." Mrs. Hanson rose quickly, blushing. She murmured to the baby: "Can't you play in here a little while? Well, I guess he'll have to go with mother." Mamma and Aunt Bessie laughed politely, and with a downward glance of tenderness. They all rose, Marjorie last.

She stayed in the rear as the party trailed through the rooms, smiling a little whenever she had to meet the eager sincerity of Mrs. Hanson's look, but reluctant. At first they did not say much, Mrs. Hanson nervous and distrait and anxiously putting things to rights as she went along; but gradually the genuineness of Mrs. Hanson's affection for this little house for which she and Tom had chosen the plans, bought the furniture, set out the trees, where the baby had been born, worked upon the two older women. They began agreeing and exclaiming.

"Aren't these cupboards convenient? Did you notice, Bessie?"

"Yes, I do like all this cupboard room in modern houses."

"And then there's another set of shelves in this little closet."

"Well! That *is* an idea! See this, Bessie. This little linen closet."

Mrs. Hanson responded with a shy eagerness. She al-

most forgot about the sale, in the delight of showing the closets and cupboards of her first housekeeping venture under their appreciation, standing back flushed and pleased when they exclaimed over the rows of bright jelly-glasses in her cupboard, glad that there was someone to see and appreciate her wedding gift of a green lustre-ware tea-set that she had never had a chance to use, she had got acquainted with so few people in Buena Vista; glancing often at Aunt Bessie with a quick shy smile, and at Marjorie with a slightly troubled, asking look, but addressing most of what she said to Mrs. Schoessel.

"Do you care to go upstairs?" she asked. And when they said: "Why, I think so—shan't we, Bessie?" "Oh, yes, I'd like to see the upstairs," her eyes glinted with a quick answering smile and she sped on ahead of them breathlessly apologizing for the state in which they might find the rooms.

At the head of the bright new stairs, mamma and Aunt Bessie paused and held a low colloquy.

"It really is nice. I don't blame her for hating to leave it."

"*I* don't see but that it's just what we're looking for, Etta —if you really mean to leave the house."

"Do you? . . . She's a nice little woman, isn't she? It makes me ashamed to think I never called on her."

Marjorie waited, silent, on the next to the last step.

They went into the bedroom. Mrs. Hanson, waiting for them, aware of what the little conference had meant, glanced quickly at them. But the conference seemed to have been decisive for mamma and Aunt Bessie. Now there was nothing but exclamation and agreement—oh, yes, these rooms were quite large enough for bedrooms, they were *nice* and warm, it didn't matter if the bathroom was small with just three people to use it. Pausing before leaving the little back bedroom, all three exchanged confidences in a sudden intimacy of agreement. Marjorie did not join in. She pretended to be looking out of the window. Un-

willingly, she liked Mrs. Hanson, wanted to satisfy that quick, ingenuous, asking glance. She admitted the sweetness and simplicity in the air of the little bedroom, with its scattered significant signs of the life passed there, the secret flushed happiness of Mrs. Hanson's face as she too saw these. But it was not hers. She would not be boxed up here—no, absolutely no. She would not admit the too vivid picture of herself living in this bright new house, eating little feminine meals with mamma and Aunt Bessie in the small dining-room, having nothing to do in the evenings. The view from the window—the little elm against the blue, the raw untravelled road, the vacant lot across the street —was alien, promised nothing.

Mamma and Aunt Bessie seemed to think it all settled. They left the house with pleased, excited comments, one quickly answering the other. All their old objections were reinterpreted.

"I don't know that it's so inconvenient, after all, to live this far from town. Town is building out this way, too."

"I don't believe having no attic is such an objection, Etta. You know we could use the back porch as a sleeping-porch, just as she said. When it got too warm, Marjorie and I could sleep out there."

"It would be a comfort to have everything new and in good order."

Marjorie tramped along beside them, stiffly withholding any reply, burning with inward protest and despair. They tried now to draw her into agreement. "I believe you'd enjoy that little bedroom, Margie. We could have the walls tinted, of course. It has nice big windows." Her rebellion would be pent up no longer. Their excitement was dampened, they were reluctant to give up their brief eagerness in their new plans, thought she had liked it too, could not see why not. By the time they reached their own street, everything was in open discussion, and discontents, desires, that had been silenced for months were at last speaking.

"But why don't you like it? I can't see."

"I said it would be all right for you and Aunt Bessie. But *I* don't want to live there."

"But there's plenty of room. There's no reason why that extra room downstairs shouldn't be a bedroom. It's a nice room—you take that, darling, if you don't like the room upstairs."

"It isn't the rooms. It hasn't anything to do with them."

"Well, but I don't see then . . . I thought you didn't want to keep the old house. Don't you think the bungalow is pretty?" mamma asked anxiously.

"I don't care how it looks. All bungalows look just the same. I don't want to live in it. There isn't anything for me to *do* there."

"Why, there's surely as much for you to do as anywhere else! And I thought you didn't like keeping up our big house!"

"I don't mean housework. Anyway, you and Aunt Bessie do all the real housework."

"Dear me!" mamma said, with a queer ruffled laugh. "If I thought it was more *house*work you wanted to do!"

"It isn't. You know it, mamma. There isn't anything for me to do in Buena Vista."

Aunt Bessie was silent, anxious, her lips slightly quivering. But mamma was voluble with surprise, refutation, hurt.

"Why, you know that there are lots of things. All the things we've talked about."

"What!" Marjorie demanded with disdain.

"I don't see any reason on earth why you shouldn't have a gymnasium class like that girl in Bronson. You talk about not doing anything, but there's all that lovely training going to waste. . . ."

"Gymnasium class!" Marjorie snorted. She looked off fiercely at the row of winter trees, rigid with her sense of the futility and indignity of the suggestion.

"Well, you know you can keep on working in the store

and you know how Bud needs someone while he's getting started."

"I hate the store. I never *did* want to work in the store."

"Well, it seems to me you aren't satisfied with anything! You don't want to teach. I don't see what you could find any better anywhere else than right here, where we need you."

Marjorie hung up her coat in the hall and then went up to her own room to put away her hat in the closet. She was still burning with her feeling of rebellion, misunderstanding, helplessness, quivering with her sense of the hopelessness of communicating what she really meant, her realization of how they interpreted it. All the things that mamma suggested were little time-fillers leading nowhere, all revolving about her present position as companion to mamma. Like getting up a gymnasium class! People might come—all the fat women who were sweating alone in their houses and trying not to eat white bread and sweets, a few girls with nothing in particular to do. They would come for a while and then get tired of it—just as they had done with Frances Patterson's folk-dancing classes. It was a filler—nothing real. She hated all that the new bungalow implied. It would be better to stay here. Things were starting to go to pieces; the roof was beginning to need shingling, the furnace did not act well, the lawn would be too much for them to care for when Bud was married and had left them. Even mamma was beginning to acknowledge that the place was a burden. It would grow to be so more and more. But it was dear—the wide lawn, the pleasant elderly rooms, the little secret nooks where the snowball-bush made a shadow and where the lilies-of-the-valley were dark-leaved and thick. She saw herself staying, year after year, quiet, seldom leaving the place, cherishing the things that remained significant and precious from the old family life . . . like Miss Ida Willis, in the big square frame house with the cupola at the edge of town, where once judges and state officials and visiting lecturers had dined, and where now the life of the

solitary woman achieved a kind of dignity and significance from continuity. To do that would be sad, a life that was always dwindling, but it might have a faint touch of meaning.

But it was useless to think of staying here. She didn't really want to do it. The old life, now rich and beautiful in retrospect, had closed in, was dwindling. Mamma felt it. At first she had said that she would never leave. But the house was no longer the centre that it used to be. Mamma was a widow, set slightly apart from her old friends. When the Willises and Fitzpatricks planned outings, the Schoessels were asked as a courtesy, not as essential to the company. Mamma had to drop out of the things to which husbands and wives went together. The life in the house itself centred around Bud. If the furnace was "acting up," or the meat-grinder would not work, it was—"Wait until Bud comes home and we'll see what he says about it." Marjorie was, in a sense, still a little girl to her mother and Aunt Bessie. They worried about her health and begged her to wear rubbers, mended her clothes, made new things for her. But in another sense she was tacitly accepted by both as one of them, another unattached woman, ready to set aside her own plans and convictions for Bud. It was Bud who was earning the money now. Bud—suddenly become a hard-working, responsible young man, suggested for the town council, a sponsor for the Chautauqua, soon to be married and become a solid citizen of the town.

But Marjorie recognized with guilt that mamma and Aunt Bessie had given up the notion of the bungalow, in spite of their shame at what Mrs. Hanson would think of them. She was relieved . . . and yet she was resentful. They would plan nothing that did not include, as essential, her being with them. She loved them, but she wanted to hold herself from their claims. They were worried, puzzled; and then with a new resolute cheerfulness, as if they had come to an understanding, began to make sugges-

tions. Aunt Bessie wanted to do something, too. The rent from her farm was uncertain in these times, the house in Shell Rock was not yet sold. Unexpectedly she swung over to Marjorie's side, spoke her own wistful dissatisfaction, made tentative suggestions; and in the new interest and promise of her plans, she grew eager, and, as Mrs. Fitz. remarked, seemed to "have a new lease of life." Their once having planned to leave the house had made a break. They admitted that there was little chance of earning money in Buena Vista, and began to talk about going to Wahseta. Aunt Bessie had always believed that she might do something with her fancy work. If they were in Wahseta, she might sell things to the Woman's Exchange. She began cutting out from magazines pages that described and pictured little "specialties" with which other women—invalids who had been confined to their own homes for years—had found some interesting means of earning a living: fashioning quaint little dolls out of corncobs, making bags, even making candy. Wasn't there some woman who had put a plate of home-made candy in a meat market and now had a candy business of her own that brought her in mamma forgot just how much a year and included she forgot how many States! Aunt Bessie and Marjorie were so clever at making things—think of those dear little pictures of fairies Marjorie used to draw on her little blackboard years ago! They might even have a gift-shop. Aunt Bessie and mamma spoke of this with sprightly hopefulness, thinking that its modern decorative sound would be something that would really appeal. Or they might rent the house for a year or so, take light-housekeeping rooms in Wahseta, and Marjorie and Aunt Bessie take a library course. Aunt Bessie had loved her old work in the reading-room in Shell Rock.

Marjorie gave only grudging answers, reluctant half-consent. When mamma wistfully hoped that she would take up her reading again, she refused angrily. Then she sat huddled on the window-seat on the landing, her forehead pressed drearily to the cool glass, thinking. There had been

something in the reading that she had really wanted. But she had satisfied herself on the night of the recital when she had been Titania. She had spoken it—that little clear soprano note—made it her own. She could not go on. . . . They were disappointed in her, in spite of all their fond eagerness to keep her with them. She had not lived up to their expectations for Marjorie Schoessel. She felt the strain of envy, of the necessity for keeping up with the others, when she thought of Neva, Anne, Esther Willis, who was dancing on the stage—they were recognized as successful. People spoke with awe of Neva's achievement . . . and just for a moment, Marjorie pictured herself as married to a rich man, being "in society," reaching the things—social position, elegance, irreproachableness of surroundings—that had formed part of her old dreams of Southern mansions and English castles. But only part. She could not rouse herself to envy Neva anything but the achievement of a place of her own. It was something else that had become essential. Money—even independence by itself—would not give that. Mamma did not see why it would not have helped to become a successful reader, to appear on platforms, have her name known to people; or to be the wife of a colonel in the army with her photograph in fashionable magazines . . . nothing without that inner satisfaction whose poignant taste had spoiled her old delight in simply being first, in "shining," and had half defeated her. "You take up things and then you drop them." First music, then reading. They complained that she did not know what she did want. She could still glimpse that satisfaction in these things, but an old reservation, deeply buried and yet long existent, held her back from them. If she could not have the best, what was real, from them, she wanted nothing. "I won't *diddle*," she whispered fiercely, with her forehead pressed against the window-pane. Emily had gone one way, and she would go another.

Uncle Albert's letter came. Mamma read it out loud.

"Better send the girl out here again, we didn't get half enough of her. I intend to put Rex in charge of a new filling station and the boys need someone to keep their accounts for them. I don't see why you and Bessie don't make up your minds to come out here."

"Oh, well, of course you don't want to do that," mamma said comfortably.

Aunt Bessie commented, bending down over her fancy work: "Albert certainly is enthusiastic about the West! But I don't know—doesn't seem to me I want to *live* out there."

Marjorie said nothing. When, in the days following, she brought up Uncle Albert's letter again, they thought it was only perversity. They were amazed that she should recur to it. Then, when they saw that she really did mean it, they could not understand. She had refused all the interesting things that they had suggested, had been suited with nothing. And now she talked about keeping accounts for a garage! Aunt Bessie's plans would be spoiled. They could not make her out. . . . It was not the work, not the West and the change and being with Uncle Albert and Aunt Mary. It was the remembrance of that one moment on the hot canyon slope—the dusk of the pines across the creek high against the burning sky, the one little harebell trembling blue above the white stones, a profile dark against the hot sunshine and a thin brown hand moving restlessly.

Other moments, half forgotten, came back to her. While she was alone in the kitchen putting away the last of the dishes, or watering the plants in the parlour with the little silver pitcher that had been Grandma Blossom's, she was living in those moments again. Jolting through the spring-scented darkness in the rickety old carriage to the overflow meeting. She could remember sitting up in the tree-house with that little boy who had visited the Wilcoxes years and years ago . . . the boy saying, when they heard the others calling away down below them through the branches: "We won't let them know we're up here." These memories took

the place of others . . . moments alone in the tree-house, hearing the minuet and seeing the sunshine silver-grey on Mrs. Phillips' fur rug, lying with Emily on the hill-side above the blue sea at Plymouth and feeling the music of Christina Rossetti's poems sink slowly into silence . . . the overflow meeting, the night when she had been the Fairy Queen. . . . Somehow she must get that satisfaction that was a warmth in the blood, that gave all life a glowing centre. The two ways made each a different pattern; but the patterns were intertwined.

2

Marjorie went at her packing with feverish doggedness. She glanced about her room with a cold estrangement so that she would not have to feel the appeal of the little book-case and the Circassian walnut with its wavy satiny grain. She could not even take care of the dolls in their reed carriage in the dusty attic—bisque dolls, with their heads fallen pathetically to one side and their "real hair" matted. She was leaving the tree-house, sad and aged and lonely in the last of winter, dingy thawing snow around it, the boards dark with the moisture slowly sinking into them.

Buster. What would be done with him if mamma and Aunt Bessie should go away? She had been the old dog's ally and chief defender. He cared more for her than for anyone else in the world. He trusted her. She had been the one who had looked out for Buster.

She did not even tell Buster good-bye. He was out in the back yard—she saw him . . . limping slowly across the wintry garden. She did not call him. She scarcely looked at the house as she went.

The ride to the station was dazed, unreal. All that any of them seemed able to notice was the way the car skidded turning the slushy corners. The Phillips house was empty and blank, some paper caught in the hedge. It was the same when she said good-bye to her mother and Aunt Bessie at the train. Their hurt and their reluctance at her going

broke into fondness only at the last moment when they kissed her. While the train was leaving Buena Vista, she did not look out of the window but was busy arranging her wraps.

But remembrance came later. She knew how the house was standing there . . . the dingy snow seeping into the porch floor and making patches in the yard, the hard maple black and leafless near the withered snowball-bush. She had left it hastily and almost casually, without a backward glance. With no dramatic emphasis. How queer, how cheap and small life could be—the very moments that should be important scamped and understated!

She did not want to think of mamma and Aunt Bessie going up the walk to the house. She could not stop for what they were saying: First it's one thing and then another, she must have this and she must have that, and now after all that she's said and done she goes out to Denver to work in a garage—we give her up! A warmth flushed slowly through her. She did not deny the picture. But under all the twistings and halting of her career, the selfishness, the ironic absurdities, she knew that there had been one thing after all—the need to satisfy the craving for something that was deep and beautiful and beyond what people called "everyday things."

She didn't care how ridiculous she seemed, or whether anyone could understand or not. She simply had to plunge on now . . . and then slowly, after a long, long time, perhaps things cleared away.

The lights were on in the swaying train. She took out the magazine that Bud had run down to the drug store to get for her, in spite of his disapproval of her going. She kept her eyes on that, away from the dim cornfields where gaunt, bent-over stalks stood in patches of wet black earth. Bluish dusk was settling down over the great earth and the smallness of the wintry farms. She was only dimly aware of the country as a spreading loneliness under the blue night behind the window-pane in which lights trembled.

PART V

Chapter I

I

OH, here she is! She's come now!"

The ladies all exclaimed joyously, turned from their talk or work (they were making lampshades this winter) to greet Etta Schoessel as she came into the room. She had to kiss the ones whom she had not seen before, to reply to the questions and comments. "You look as if it agreed with you out there!" "How long will you be here? You surely won't leave without giving us a little time. We want a *little* visit with you." They would not let her take the chair that Mrs. Patterson brought for her, but made her sit down on the davenport between Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mrs. Percy Franklin. "Well, I guess we aren't going to let Mattie Willis have all of you on this visit, if you are part of the same family now!" Mrs. Fitz. declared.

Under the warmth of greeting, the urgent invitations to meals, the protests because she was going away so soon, she was almost sorry that she had made her visit so short that she would really have time for nothing but this meeting of the Tourist Club at Mrs. B. T. Patterson's. But she had done it purposely, afraid that if she once got home and really had a chance to pick up the old life, to be with the old friends again, she could not bear to actually break away. So she explained to everyone, she had just come back on a flying trip to see the children, attend to a little necessary business, and then pack up the furniture that she wanted to take out West with her and dispose of the rest.

But she was not really sorry. She was not going to let them persuade her to change her plans. The old atmosphere

of the club meetings enveloped her. These ladies, all her oldest and best friends . . . the best friends she had in the world . . . meeting here in Mrs. Patterson's familiar rooms on this cold winter day that made the warmth of the parlour with the golden-brown window drapes and the shining woodwork, the little hiss and bubble of the big silvered radiator, the crisp odour of coffee that came when the swinging door of the kitchen was opened . . . all the more cosy. The feminine hubbub in the room, low-toned intimate conversations going on over the making of lamp-shades, and the glimpse beyond the colonnade of Frances Patterson and Ada Willis stepping softly about from the buffet to the cupboard and setting out on the beautifully embroidered lunch-cloth on the round oak table the best silver spoons and forks and flowered Haviland cups that would soon be filled with Mrs. Patterson's delicious coffee. . . . She knew it all so well, had been so long a part of it. But she was not so now. No, now that she was here, she knew that her interests lay elsewhere. For just a moment she was tempted. She thought: "Well, do I really have to go back? Can't I do just as much for Bud and Marian here?" But she knew that it was not so. Bud did not really need her. There was Mrs. Willis.

Mrs. Tom Patterson broke into the rush of questions about what she was going to do with the house and the furniture. "What we really want to know is—*who* is this young man?"

The others all chimed in, laughing: "Yes, of course, that's what we're all interested in! We want to hear about the wedding."

Etta's face flushed with pride, pleasure, a little deprecation.

"Well, it was a very simple wedding, of course."

But she knew now that the reason why it had been so absolutely necessary for her to come back to Buena Vista so that she could see to the packing up of the furniture herself, had been the joy, the absolute necessity, of telling the ladies about Marjorie's wedding.

"You had it in your brother's home?"

"Yes, in Albert's home. There were only the two families."

"That's the way weddings ought to be," Mrs. B. T. Patterson agreed. "I don't believe in these fussy weddings. Like Neva Cole's. Mrs. Cole sent us the account of it from the San Francisco paper."

"Yes, she did us, too."

"I expect about everyone in Buena Vista got one of those papers!"

They all laughed significantly.

"Well, of course it was quite an affair. He was a high-up official. Those army weddings put on all the style there is, you know."

"Well, Margie's was very simple," Etta Schoessel said. "Of course, we none of us knew many people there. And we didn't feel like having anything that wasn't very simple, with the state our affairs are in just now."

They murmured sympathetically.

Mrs. Tom Patterson said archly: "I just thought there was something like this in the wind when you and your sister went off to Denver so suddenly!"

"Yes, but what *we* want to know is, *who* is the young man? We want to know how all this came about," Mrs. Fitzpatrick demanded. "We want the whole story. Isn't this someone Marjorie met the other time you were out there? He isn't?"

"I told you he wasn't!" Mrs. Patterson cried triumphantly.

"Well, we all had it figured out that he must be. I couldn't see why Marjorie up and went out there that way unless there was something like this behind it. I told Mr. Fitz.: 'I knew Margie Schoessel was going to get married when she went out to Denver.' Margie's been quite a while getting to it, but you can always tell, you know, when a girl's got that in her head. You can see it."

"Margie had never met Charles in her life before she went out the last time," Mrs. Schoessel protested, indignantly.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick looked wise.

"I suppose he was a friend of her cousins?" Mrs. Franklin suggested.

"No, none of them had ever known him before. It really came about in quite an odd way." And now she knew that it was for the satisfaction of telling this romantic story that she had been so anxious not to miss the club meeting. "No, he used to come to the garage when he came in from his trips. The boys noticed that he was a pretty regular customer. He used to talk sometimes to Marjorie, but she didn't really know him. Well, and then they all met him one night at a party where the boys took Margie. And after that he began coming over to the house——"

"And then it was all settled, I suppose!" Mrs. Fitz. cried archly.

They demanded to know about him, and she told them. His parents lived in Wyoming, where his father was a lawyer. Charles had been in service in France—had left just at the beginning of his law course—and then it had seemed that he could not bear to go back to it, he had dropped out so far. So he had come to Denver and begun travelling through the West for a rubber-tire company. She stressed the lawyer part and made light of the salesmanship. "His parents are fine people. We met the mother—Mr. Winterset couldn't get away from his practice. They came from Wisconsin, Mr. Winterset had a fine law practice there, but they had to go West on account of her health. Charles went to the University of Wyoming. He's had a good education." It was not necessary for them to know all about everything, the quarrel Charles had had with his father when he had refused to go on with his law course, and how at first he had worked driving a truck in Denver—jobs had been so hard to get then, so many returned soldiers had gone West looking for work. Charles had confided all this to her, as he had to Marjorie. She had sympathized and understood, although of course she would rather have had him a lawyer. They would not understand why he had done it,

what a nice boy he was—he was like one of her own boys to her now. She thought that she could see in him something of Rich.

"And they're going to live in Denver?" Mrs. Franklin asked, with a touch of respect. "I thought it was a beautiful city when Percy and I were out there. We had some friends living there—the Ralstons. I don't know whether you happen to have heard of them. They have such a lovely home there. I think there are some beautiful houses." She gave a little dissatisfied laugh. She had not yet been able to persuade Percy to give up his place in the bank and move to a city, although she kept at it.

"Well, for the present," Etta Schoessel said. "But Charles has bought a two-hundred-acre fruit farm on the western slope—he had a little money of his own—and just as soon as the trees really get in bearing, I suppose he and Marjorie will move out there."

"Fruit farm!" the ladies exclaimed.

She held herself stiff and smiling, ready to defend Marjorie's choice, much as she had wondered at it at first herself. Margie, of all people, to live on a ranch! Her mother still remembered the way that Margie used to act when they went out to Grandpa Schoessel's in the country. Still, a fruit ranch in western Colorado sounded very different, much more enterprising and "interesting," to the ladies, than a farm in Iowa. Yes, it was "different." A number of old families—the senior Franklins among them—had moved out to fruit farms in California (although Mr. Franklin simply owned his place, didn't attempt to work it himself); and then, of course, the Bushes had made that disastrous move to Alabama—Mr. Bush had some kind of railroad job now in a little Southern town, and they were living to get back to Iowa. She smiled, put the very best face on the matter, told what beautiful country it was, so near the mountains, so healthful, and not too far from Denver for Marjorie and Charles to get there sometimes in the winter. But she told none of the inside story—how Charles could

take no more interest in anything but outdoor work since he had come from the army; how he had told her that "nature" was about all that seemed decent and worth while to him; how amazingly Marjorie had given up all the things that she used to want, until now she was as enthusiastic over the fruit ranch as Charles. She knew that the ladies were thinking it a strange choice for Marjorie Schoessel, with her talents and her training, and her position in Buena Vista—that they were setting it against Neva's marriage. But whatever she herself had thought at first, whatever had been her bewilderment and disappointment, she clung now with passionate allegiance to Marjorie.

"But *you* aren't going to desert us!" one of the ladies cried reproachfully. "You're coming back."

"Oh, no, I think I'm going to stay out in Denver."

And as they all protested, telling her that they couldn't bear to give her up, that she belonged here, the young couple could get on without her, she sat back, moved, but smiling and shaking her head. There was so much, after all, that she could not tell them. It did not really explain the story to say that she and Bessie had taken rooms there, that her brother Albert wanted her to stay, that she would feel closer to Marjorie. They complained—"Seems to me all our nicest girls go and marry away from home, away off somewhere, and then, the first thing you know, it means the parents go along after them. We've lost the Coles, and the Struthers—now Etta Schoessel does the same thing!" She knew very well that those children would need her, starting off with so little capital on that difficult adventure, Charles not very strong since he had been gassed in the army, his father not willing to help him (she had not told the history of that). Perhaps she might have preferred to have Marjorie marry someone here at home—but that, she knew, Marjorie would never have been content to do. And there was Bessie, too. She hadn't told about that, to anyone except Mattie Willis, and of course they were almost related now. It was all right, a perfectly ladylike thing to do, and

Bessie was much happier now that she was occupied with it. The travel books were very nice, and the company would employ only high-class, refined saleswomen. Bessie had made as much as thirty-five dollars a week; and although it was hard for her to go into the houses, she liked to be getting out and doing something. But there was no need for the ladies here to know. It was all very well there, where no one knew Bessie, but of course she couldn't have done it here.

These explanations, interrupted now and then by questions about the lamp-shades and by going to look at what this one or that one had accomplished, were stopped altogether by Frances Patterson coming in to pass the napkins. The ladies had to exclaim over the lovely little luncheon napkins, to remember what beautiful embroidery Mrs. Cole had always done, and to wonder if she still kept it up. Mrs. Percy Franklin had received a very pretty handkerchief from her at Christmas time. Ada Willis followed Frances with a plate of chicken salad and sandwiches on a tray. "This is for the honoured guest first of all," she said. Mrs. Fitz. cried with arch reproach: "See what you get for being so bad and going off and leaving us! You oughtn't to give her a thing, Ada." Then the clear, amber-brown coffee—no one could make such coffee as Mrs. Patterson, unless it was Mrs. Bradley—was poured from the shining silver pot into the flowered Haviland cups and the room was crisply fragrant with its steam. Now the silken golden-brown draperies shut the company in from the bleak street, making this fresh shining room a little world, all the talk easy and free, with the ease of their long association together and their sense of being the chosen matrons of the town.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick left the davenport to instruct someone who was simply determined to finish her lamp-shade before she went home. Little Mrs. Roe Willis hurried over, smiling and shy, to fill the empty place beside Etta Schoessel on the davenport, and Mrs. B. T. Patterson and Mattie Willis drew their chairs up closely. The four made a little intimate

company; and their talk together, low-toned, confiding and sympathetic, was the best part of the afternoon. Etta could tell things to them that she could not tell to the others. Intimate as she had always been with Mrs. Fitzpatrick, she knew that little vein of sharp curiosity in her too well. But to these three women—Mattie Willis, Marian's mother; Mrs. Roe Willis with her delicate little face and pretty grey hair and small worn hands, gentle and intelligent and retiring, with the simplicity of her affection; and Mrs. Patterson, fat, jolly, tolerant, her dress making billows of silk as she sat rocking with her little plump hands grasping the arms of her chair, and feet coming down flat on the floor—to these three women, out of all the room, she could tell the truth.

They talked about the house. Mattie Willis reported all that Marian had told her about "those people" who had rented the upper floor—how they saved all their sheets until they had a huge washing, and how they wore red flannel underwear, and the fuss they made over their dog. "Well, of course," Etta said, "when you try to rent a house in Buena Vista, you have to take what renters you can get. He does pay his rent." "He ought to," Mrs. Patterson said. "He gets good wages." They sympathized with Etta over having to sell the house, reassured her. "'Oh, it's really better than to rent it, if you have to leave it anyway. If it's sold, it's off your mind, and you don't have to think about who's in it. You know it was so long before the Coles would sell their house, and they had those awful people in it. They didn't take any care of it, simply ruined those beautiful floors." "Yes, let their cat scratch its claws on the wall paper! I saw that when I went over to get the garden things. The woman didn't like it when I came very well, either. But Mrs. Cole told me to do it. She'd planted that garden herself. There was no need for those people to get that, too." Mrs. Roe Willis sighed gently: "I'm afraid people don't respect other people's property."

She told them more about Marjorie's marriage, no longer on the defensive. She was soothed when they all agreed

that it was better to marry as Marjorie and Charles were doing, than to make such a marriage as Neva's. A man years older, and a widower at that! Knowing the Coles, they said, they could guess what had led to that. "Well, he had money, of course." "Oh, yes, and position. The Coles would think about that—*she* would. I felt sorry for Mr. Cole, he hated to sell out and move out there. Nothing out there for him, anyway. She did all the managing for Neva. I remember when he came back to dispose of the store, he said to Fred: 'Well, I never thought I'd come to doing this, but I guess we've all got to do a lot of things we never intended to.'" The ladies murmured agreement. Their sympathy soothed the rankling wound made by the knowledge that Mrs. Phillips now approved Neva more than Marjorie, wrote to her, was going to visit her when she went to the Coast.

But out of all her old circle of friends, these three were now perceived as most congenial to herself; all of them had, what seemed more essential to her than anything else, that simple quality of unseeking goodness and affection. She might try to impress the other ladies with Marjorie's success. But these three agreed with that which was her creed under and beyond all ambitions for her child, all rivalries; which made her willing to have the marriage, to help with it and approve and defend it, unsensible as in some ways it must seem. They said: "Well, she's going to be happy, and that's the *main* thing!"

"Oh, is it late? Yes, it really is!"

The company broke up, they hurried away, this intimate hour was gone. But Etta Schoessel left in a satisfied glow, warmed by their friendship and understanding. She had told these three women and they had understood. Her real purpose in coming back had been satisfied.

The others who were left talked when she and Mattie Willis had gone. They expressed their feeling over the marriage which they could not express before. They wondered if the man really amounted to much after all. It didn't look

like it, with his going from one thing to another like that. Well, you couldn't tell what girls were going to do.

2

The two women hurried down the street together, still in a warm glow from that half-hour of intimacy when those four friends had spoken their minds about many things. About the Coles, for instance. All of them had been longing to do that. Their talk had been a confession. Etta and Mattie Willis still kept up the conversation in a desultory way, interspersed with little comments. "Do you suppose the Phillpses will ever come back? I don't think so, to stay"; and, "Do you know, I never realized before to-day how little real understanding there is between me and Mrs. Fitz. It's when you get away that you see those things."

The trees were bleak and wintry along the wide street, a car going down the icy pavement skidded in spite of its crunching chains. But this was home, and always would be. Etta's face clouded and she was silent. In spite of her satisfaction and pride in coming back to tell the ladies about her married daughter, some of the old puzzling questions came back. Marjorie had always been so "particular," she had wanted this and she had wanted that. Etta thought of the sacrifices that she and Ed had made. But if it was all to come to this in the end, anyway, why couldn't Margie have been content to marry Chub Patterson and let them all stay in Buena Vista? She had never really understood what Marjorie was "after." She thought that girls were not quite the same as they used to be. She did not know just what Marjorie's career had all been about. . . . Still, as the ladies had said, if she was happy, that was the *main* thing.

They were passing her own house before she realized it. There it stood—the large, comfortable white house in its wide sloping lawn, with the bushes and flower-beds that she herself had planted. And yet it was alien. The windows stared blankly at her. Marian's blue drapes looked

strange in the front window, and the wicker fern basket standing there. She would *never* have had in her house such curtains as those people had in their bedroom upstairs. They made her shudder. Other people were living in the house. It was no longer hers. She had never been sure until now—she had dreaded this moment—but now she knew that she did not want to come back to it.

But she stopped in her conversation with Mattie, paused looking across the wintry yard, frozen and bleak, with little icy patches among the withered short brown grass that scarcely covered the hard earth.

"Our back yard doesn't look the same with the big maple gone!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe I should ever have let Bud do that if I had been going to stay. I won't dare tell Margie about it. She thought so much of the little playhouse she used to have up in that tree."

"Bud thought the tree was shading the garden, didn't he?"

"Yes, but Margie would never admit an excuse like that." Yes, and Margie would never admit, either, that it had been necessary, "the kindest thing," to put old Buster out of the way. But Margie had not stayed to look after him, and Bud had had to do *something* . . . .

And as they walked on, Mattie talking about Marian and the new house she and Bud meant to build in the summer, Etta was thinking . . . the old life was gone from this house; her place in it was gone; now her interest was with her children. Now it was Marjorie who had the home, and her mother's life centred in that. No, she did not want to come back. In spite of the bleak yard with that raw stump where the beautiful old tree had been, the house with the dreadful curtains in her own window, she went on quite happily with Mattie.

"I wonder if we hadn't better stop in town and get some rolls to take along for supper."

"Not for me, certainly, after those lovely refreshments! Mrs. B. T. is such a wonderful cook! I suppose you'll want something for the rest of the family, though."

And as they went on toward the bakery, she began to tell eagerly:

"There's the nicest little bakery that Bessie and I have found just about a block from us. It's so convenient to run over and get just what you want. I get out of the way of cooking, almost. We really are quite comfortable there. I think we're going to like it, Mattie. Of course, if Margie weren't there . . . But in the summer, I suppose we'll be out with her. There'll be enough to do! I might have chosen to stay here—but it didn't come out that way, and we have to take it as it is. And I can see that there are going to be some good things about it."

THE END

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